

LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1809.—VOL. LI.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JUNE 2, 1888.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[RESCUED FROM DEATH.]

THE BROWN LADY.

CHAPTER XV.

A GREAT surprise awaited Mr. Holroyd's visitors next day when they entered the library—his own sanctum—that is to say. They discovered, to their astonishment, the long-banished, full-length picture of his daughter hanging over the chimney-piece! He had had it carried up, cleaned, and hung in this place of honour, partly to ease—indeed, chiefly to ease—his own conscience, and partly to satisfy his curiously outspoken and not to be overawed young companion.

Ver, little was said about this proceeding, but a good deal was thought, you may be sure. Mr. Isaac expressed his surprise and delight in fitting terms, and then foolishly asked the reason of his translation from the lumber-room?

"My wish!" was the brief reply, and it was made in such a tone of voice, that he prudently dropped the subject.

A visit from Squire Daecres was the event of the day. He came at long intervals to see his old blind neighbour. He had not seen him now for ten years, and found him greatly aged, bent, and altered. The Squire had a great deal to say, and some questions to ask. He was rather curious about the pretty girl who occupied the Holroyds' pew.

"Any relative of yours?" he asked, inquisitively.

"No! Why?"

"Because she's a Holroyd all over!"

"Stuff!" exclaimed the old man, ferociously.

"She's an uncommonly pretty girl—too pretty. One would think you had your eyesight when you chose her, eh! All the women are down on her; but I say, what is it to them if she has no character? It's not as if she was in a ladies' school!"

"Who says she has no character?" asked Mr. Holroyd, firing up.

"Why, everyone. Miss Cotton, for one!"

"I'll back Miss May's against hers any day. My relation, Lady Carlton, will vouch for her respectability. If half the girls in the country

were as well behaved it would be a good thing for them. No character, indeed!"

"Well! no references; perhaps that's it," said the Squire, apologetically.

"Aye, may be! She was only in one place before. She's a good, quiet, clever girl, fit to associate with the best, and if I hear a word against her from anyone I'll—I'll knock his head off;" and Mr. Holroyd hammered his stick angrily on the ground.

"Oh! well; if Lady Carlton is her social godmother she's all right," said Squire Daecres, still more apologetically, "there's not a word to be said. I have taken a great fancy to her appearance myself. She looks a nice, innocent girl, and as if she had good blood in her veins. She's uncommonly like someone—"

"Like who?"

"I can't tell you!" he answered, rather brusquely. "Don't let Gordon make a fool of her, that's all I say."

"She's much more likely to make a fool of him," said the old man, with decision.

"No, no! impossible. Gordon is a knave, not a fool!"



"You never liked him," exclaimed Mr. Holroyd, irritably.

"Never! It was against my will, as you know, that he married Elizabeth; but she would have her own way, like most women, and a nice hash she made of her life, poor girl! Gordon was not a good husband, I'm sure of that!"

"He never ill-treated her," interrupted his uncle.

"No! but I believe he neglected her. I don't say she hadn't a temper; but—"

"But you must allow, John Dacres, that of late she was very queer—in fact, quite strange in her mind."

"If she made a bad bargain, so did he. A man does not like a half-witted wife, draggle-tailed and indolent, and helpless, moping and mewing beside him all day. These may seem hard words to a father, but they are the truth."

"Well, we won't quarrel over the dead. You keep your opinion, and I keep mine. Although I don't like Gordon—and I believe he is selfish, extravagant, and I won't say what else—my wife has taken a fancy to him, and has told me to ask him and his father over to our Christmas-trees and *tableaux-vivants* next Thursday; and as you say, Miss May is a protégée of Lady Carlton's, I ask her, too, on my own account. She hasn't much amusement here."

"No! and she may go for once; but she must have a card of invitation, and everything in proper form. Mind that, and that she is not to get the habit of going out."

"Oh! I'll mind; and now good-bye. I'll not be so long in coming to see you again, and I'll look in soon, and have another talk over old times."

And with this announcement, which was received by a grunt, Squire Dacres departed.

By what means Squire Dacres procured his wife's signature to an invitation card for Miss May will never be known; but there it was in due form. And having Mr. Holroyd's permission to go, she hurried off to Miss Gaspard, her only village friend, to consult her about her dress, and to ask permission to join her, and to go under her wing to this great festivity, for to expect to accompany Mr. Isaac and his son would be soaring too high altogether.

"Of course you can come with us!" said Miss Gaspard, good-naturedly, "and there is a girl in the village that makes very well, and will turn you out a very decent dress if you give her the material."

The material was to be black—black-lace, or black-net—and made as plain as possible; in short, as befitted a girl in Linda May's position.

Linda dressed herself with some trepidation on the eventful evening. She was wearing an evening dress for the first time, and going into company also for the first time. She had a tremulous feeling that she would be a goose among swans!

What right had she—an unknown, nameless orphan—to herd with the best families in Kent?

On the other hand, she had a conviction that she was as good as any of them. It seemed too wild an idea to breathe into anyone's ear that she believed herself to be Arabella Holroyd's daughter. Where were her proofs? people would say. Well, there was her face, that was one proof; her age exactly tallied with the age of Arabella's infant. She had a queer little mole on her shoulder, that now she came to examine it might be taken for a crescent in shape, though she had never noticed the resemblance before.

Mr. Isaac's agitation too, was strange. Why did he look as if he had seen a ghost when he first beheld her? Why did he cross-examine her so closely? Why did his hand tremble, and why was his face averted?

Strong proof as these were to her, they would be laughed at by a cool-brained outsider who had no interest in the issue, nor an intensely sanguine disposition like her own.

She gazed at herself in the glass rather discontentedly. Her dress was so very, very plain; she had no ornaments save a row of ancient coral beads round her neck—a row of red beads, from which depended a little, fat, red coral heart. She had found it in Miss Mee's workbox, and it had not struck her as being worth pawing in those gloomy, miserable days of last year. Now it gave a bit of colour to her sombre dress—that and a bouquet of red camellias that Nan's sweetheart had arranged and provided at Nan's bidding.

Linda said to herself that "she did not look so very bad, after all, and no one would notice her. She was going to see, not to be seen;" and throwing her seal-skin coat round her she hurried away, as the fly which was to take her to Miss Gaspard's had long been waiting humbly at a side door.

Linda, who now knew her way almost blind-fold about the narrow, old passages and sudden stairs and sharp corners, hurried briskly along, candle in hand. As she came to one abrupt angle in a passage a great black cat—a monster, it seemed to her, with bright, yellow eyes—came bounding towards her; and as she rounded the sharp corner, almost running, she came face to face with a figure—a black-hooded figure. More she should could not see, for her candle was instantaneously blown out—yes, *blown out*.

Frightened out of her wits, with a stifled shriek she rushed past this mysterious and horrible thing, and fled down the passage faster than she had ever run in her life; and it seemed to her that a voice called after her: "Arabella! Arabella!" but this might have been imagination, for the noise of her own footsteps and the drum-like beating of her own heart were, it seemed to her, loud enough to drown a whole battery of artillery.

What joy! what relief! to turn another corner and come into the full blaze of the lamps that lit up the corridor, which was in the new part of the house—the corridor and grand staircase.

Flying breathlessly down this staircase she came upon the two gentlemen in the hall below, gloved and top-coated, and ready for departure.

"What on earth has happened to you, Miss May?" ejaculated Gordon Holroyd, removing his cigarette. "Is there a mad dog after you, or a ghost, or what?"

"I thought I saw something!" she panted out in jerks; "something that blew my light out!"

"A gust of wind!" said Mr. Isaac, with a contemptuous smile. "The old part of this house has enough draughts in it to turn a windmill!"

"But I really am sure I saw something!" persisted the girl, who looked ghastly pale, and was shaking like a leaf.

"What sort of thing?"

"It was dark, and had no particular shape. It was just close to me, though I could not feel it."

"Pooh! my dear Miss May! Dark—shapeless—close to you and you could not feel it! We all know what you saw, and what you have been running away from like one distracted!"

"What?" she asked, tremulously.

"Why, your own shadow. A draught of wind, and your own shadow!"

It might be so, she acknowledged to herself, but the cat was no shadow, and no such animal was in the house to her knowledge. Moreover, it was no shadow that had sat at the foot of the bed and warned her, and dragged the clothes away from her shrinking face and trembling fingers.

However, this was no time to stand discussing the matter; she was late already. She felt half inclined not to go, her nerves were so shattered; but better go and get the horrible idea dispelled from her mind by Annie Gaspard's chatter, and by new and gay surroundings.

Mr. Holroyd had dismissed her for the evening, and her only alternative would be to

return to her own lonely, isolated room; and from the thought of that and of the intervening, vault-like passages, her mind instinctively recoiled.

Dacres Court was a blaze of light, and torches burnt all the way along on both sides of the avenue, as Dr. and Miss Gaspard and their companion for the time shambled up to the portico in the village fly.

The steps were covered with crimson cloth, and up these steps numbers of well-dressed people were ascending—women with diamonds in their hair, and men with handles to their names.

Linda felt her own insignificance as she stood in a corner of the cloak-room, and watched various splendid dames and their daughters shaking out their tulle or satin skirts, and giving their hair a last pat or touch before the big cheval glass.

Miss Gaspard had acquaintances, but she had none, this plainly-dressed girl in black; and no one looked at her, and no one spoke to her, till suddenly an old lady, in a blue velvet dress and a blazing diamond necklace, and with a very beaky nose, said, rather sharply,—

"Ah! Here, take my cloak, will you?" throwing a plush and ermine mantle into her astonished arms.

Linda took it gratefully.

"Don't stand there staring at me!" continued the old lady, authoritatively; "but be quick and give me a ticket!"

Linda coloured crimson, and there was a sort of suppressed titter among the other ladies.

Lady MacOstrich had made a mistake. She had taken Linda for one of the attendants, one of those now advanced with a broad grin, and relieved Linda of the cloak.

The old lady's apology was not a nice one, putting up her pin-nose, and surveying Linda superciliously. She mildly remarked,—

"Ah! I beg pardon. I took you for one of the housemaids! Pray excuse my mistake!" And, with a compromise between a bow and a toss of the head, Lady MacOstrich sailed out of the room.

This was a bad beginning, and the continuation was not much better. Mrs. Dacres, who stood at the entrance of a large room where the Christmas tree was being displayed, shook hands commendably with Miss Gaspard, but gave Linda such a look, and such a bow, that the unfortunate girl wished herself back at Carriabrook.

The room was full of noise and bustle, and gay voices, and in the crowd she felt comparatively at ease.

Annie Gaspard had drifted away. She was alone, no one knew her, no one looked at her, and she could gaze her fill at everyone and everything.

There was Mr. Dacres following in the Duchess of Dublin, a stout, merry-faced old lady. There was Miss Cotton, in a pale yellow satin and tulle, looped up with peeples, wearing a brilliant reviere round her neck, and talking and laughing to half-a-dozen appreciative men, including Gordon Holroyd, who appeared to be roused to unusual animation, and laughed and applauded her speeches quite uproariously; but lookers-on saw most of the game, and Linda noticed that these speeches were made at Captain Dacres, who stood close by, silent and self-possessed, with a pair of scissors in his hand, prepared to begin operations, at a given signal, on the Christmas-trees.

Presently, all the company were seated, and gifts were being handed to those whose names were called out—trifles, pretty, expensive trifles that would make a considerable ho in Squire Dacres's purse.

Linda watched the proceedings with interest—watched cigar cases, silver bottles, work-baskets, jewel caskets, bangles, brooches, and jewelled pins being handed about and admired, or raved over all round her.

Of course, there was nothing for her. She never expected anything; but she was glad to

see Annie Gaspard presented with a pretty present.

Somewhat to her surprise the Squire found her out, and squeezed himself into a seat beside her, and nodding at her affably.

"Well, Miss May!" he said, in his hearty voice, "how are you getting on? and what have you got? By Jove!" he ejaculated, and he drew in his breath, and stared at her in unmitigated surprise. "I say, did Mr. Holroyd give you that?" pointing his finger at her trumpery ornament—the coral necklace.

"No!" she answered. "Why do you ask?"

"Because it belonged to his daughter who is dead. That was Arabella's coral necklace!"

"How do you know?" gasped his listener.

"How do I know! For an excellent reason. I remember it being bought and given to her when she was quite a little child by her godmother—my first wife!"

Linda said nothing, but her heart beat very fast. This coral necklace was another proof—another link in the chain—and that a very strong one.

"May I ask how it came into your possession?" he continued, rather suspiciously, propping his elbow as he spoke, and regarding her gravely.

"Yes, certainly; and I will tell you!" she answered, with sparkling eyes. "I do not know who my parents were. I was brought up in the country by an old Miss Mee, who said that I was no relation to her. She promised to tell me all about myself, but before she could keep her promise she died."

"Well, and then—?"

"Then her brother came from Liverpool, took all her property, but her clothes, and a few books and things that were of no value. Among these things was a little, red leather work-box, very old-fashioned, and it I found a hair ring, and this necklace."

"May I see the ring?" leaning forward.

"Certainly!" taking it off, and tendering it.

"That was Arabella's too. See the small, gold fleur de lis, the Holroyd crest! At one time, twenty years ago, we were very intimate with them. They were more like relations than neighbours. Old Mr. Holroyd and my first wife were bosom friends. Latterly there has been a coolness. My daughter, who married Gordon Holroyd, was not a happy wife; but she is dead, and there is no use in keeping up enmity. I like old Holroyd for the sake of old associations; but, candidly, I can't stand Isaac. I've always thought Isaac played a deep part about Arabella. Do you know that you are very like her?"

The girl had grown pale again by this time, and a half-startled, half-pained look was in her eyes. Before she could speak he said—

"Now I must go. I see Mr. Daecres beckoning, but I'll send some one to take my place," and rising as he spoke he hurried away.

"Rupert!" he said, buttonholing his son, "I want you to do something. I have a protégée here. I want you to be good to Mr. Holroyd's reader; she's quite a stranger here—knows nobody."

In a very short time, Captain Daecres occupied his father's place. He glanced at the girl to whom he had just been introduced. She was looking straight before her; her features were delicate in outline, and almost faultlessly regular in their proportions, and her eyes were fixed abstractedly on the curtain that hung before the stage, on which the *tableaux vivants* were to be produced.

Rupert Daecres was not accustomed to be ignored and treated with indifference. He hazarded some remark about the heat of the room; she replied only by a monosyllable. Rupert began to get angry.

"Won't talk, whether she can or not; but I shall make her speak! A penny for your thoughts, Miss May?"

She gave a little start, and said—

"I could not tell them; they are too precious. Your father has been telling me some-

thing that has put very strange ideas into my head."

"Telling you about what, if I may presume to enquire?"

"About *this*!" laying her fingers on her necklace.

Rupert stared in amazement.

"Perhaps," she added quickly, "you will know more about it some day. I believe this coral necklace is a link in my life!"

At this moment the curtain drew up on the first tableau, and there was silence.

It was "Queen Mary and her Court." This was followed by "The Princess in the Tower."

"Doesn't the jailor's face remind you of someone?" whispered Captain Daecres. "Of Mr. Isaac Holroyd?"

It did. For all his benevolent words and deeds, Mr. Isaac Holroyd had a cruel and malign expression.

Between the scenes Captain Daecres talked away to his companion. It was not often that he cared to exert himself, but he could talk both intelligently and agreeably when he chose to take the trouble, and he did lay himself out to entertain and befriending this pretty, neglected, and unconventional girl, who did not know a creature in the room. And she talked to him as she had never done to mortal man in her life before; telling him of her curious girlhood—her loneliness—her struggles in London—her success in securing Mr. Holroyd's situation—her thankfulness for a shelter and a home—led on from one sentence to another by the magnetism of her companion's kind, dark eyes.

When the *tableaux* were over, and the room was once more filled with the gentle clamour of high bred voices, he did not quit her side, but escorted her to the supper-room, and waited on her there, to the fury and amazement of Maria Cotton, who surveyed the couple from a neighbouring table; and when she went away with the Gaspards, it was Rupert Daecres himself who amazed them and the two Holroyds by wrapping Miss May up in her furs, and accompanying her to the dingy fly, with as much attention and deference in his demeanour as if she had been a duchess. More so, indeed, probably; for Rupert Daecres, though courteous to all, was a lazy sort of fellow, who rarely put himself out for anyone!

CHAPTER XVI.

For several days after Linda's unwonted dissipation, Mr. Holroyd was confined to his room with a return of his bronchitis, and the interviews, which his relatives so eagerly sought for, were denied them very sternly.

He would not allow anyone near him but Miss May and old Leech. In sickness she was invaluable to him, and he refused the offers of his dear brother's tender care querulously, not to say indignantly.

No one could believe with what desperate impatience the two relatives, brother and nephew, longed for an interview. Their money troubles were pressing on them sore. Grave letters arrived daily for Mr. Isaac, and at last he rushed up to London to stave off the evil moment for even a week.

A week! Much might happen in that time. His dear elder brother was most seriously ill, delightfully ill. Before a week was over he himself might be master of Carrisbrook.

The evening before he took his departure, he and his son Gordon, who had been following the fox (and Miss Cotton), came into the library together in that dim, idle hour which precedes dressing and dinner.

Gordon threw himself back into an easy-chair, and stretched his muddied top-boots and leathers towards the blazing logs, whilst his father sat opposite, nursing one leg on another, and watching the flames with great intentness.

There was no light in the apartment beyond that given by the blazing logs, and the two men seemed to be blissfully unconscious that they were not alone.

Miss May was standing in a corner, behind a big, screen, carefully, groping for a book. She had no desire to keep herself concealed, and she was busily fingering the backs of some volumes, when she was startled by hearing Gordon say,—

"My old father-in-law was talking to me to-day about Miss May. He has got the girl on the brain. Nothing will do him but that she is Arabella Holroyd's daughter. He says her face, and manner, and voice are Arabella's over again; that she has ornaments that belonged to her; that her age tallies exactly with that of Arabella's daughter; and, to make a long story short, he is going to place the whole matter before her grandfather, and get him to put her case in the hands of detectives!"

"What business is it of his?" said Mr. Isaac, in a biting tone.

"None. But he has a knack of meddling in other people's affairs; and is as dogged in sticking to what he once takes into his head as my bull dog Billy!"

"He must never carry out his meddling here! He must never get your uncle's ear, much less put detectives on the track; for if he does we are lost! Bear that in mind, Gordon."

"What do you mean? You don't really mean that there's anything to be feared from him?"

"Everything! The girl is your cousin. Don't you see the likeness between her and the picture of her mother? It's like fate—her being in this house quite by accident! But the old man must never know who she is, nor shall she! If she was acknowledged heiress you and I would be beggars, Gordon; remember that!"

Gordon groaned aloud, and then said,—

"I'm a beggar as it is. If the old man don't go off soon I'll be completely up a gum tree!"

"The doctor to-day said he was in a very critical state," said his affectionate brother, cheerfully. "His breathing is affected. I don't think he can last long; the weather is against him."

"How much is he worth?" said Gordon, more hopefully.

"There have been great savings the last eighteen years," said Mr. Isaac, rubbing his hands. "I should not wonder if he had put by a couple of hundred thousand pounds; and the rental alone is nine thousand per annum, or more. Yes, your uncle would cut up well!"

"Two hundred thousand pounds!" echoed the other. "There's a good deal of spending in that!"

"There is; and I've promised you halves, Gordon; but if you grumble, and make the money fly, as is your habit, you'll be as bad off as ever in a twelvemonth!"

"Once I can get out of this scrape, and into smooth water, I'll promise never to put my head into such a noose again. I'll reform. I'll settle down as a respectable domestic character, and I'll marry Maria Cotton!"

"If she will have you. She'd rather have Daecres's little finger than your whole body!" replied his parent, frankly.

"And Daecres doesn't care a straw for her. He seemed rather smitten with Miss May, I thought, eh?"

"There's the first gong!" said his father, rising. "Smitten with Miss May! The man is not such a fool!"

And, so saying, he walked out of the room, followed by his hopeful offspring.

Linda's heart was beating fast. She had never played the part of eavesdropper before, and she felt both frightened and ashamed, as, leaving her hiding-place and the book she had come to seek, she stole towards the fire, and stood before it, looking dreamily into the red embers.

No need for her to hurry. She did not dine with the two guests that day.

And so she really was Arabella's daughter, Mr. Holroyd's heiress; and her name was not Linda May, but Linda Delafosse.

How was she to prove this? He Uncle

Isaac would give her no assistance for to acknowledge her claims; would, as he said, leave him a beggar.

As the girl stood thus, with her head bent and her hands clasped, and her pretty girlish figure thrown out into strong relief against the firelight, she was aroused from her meditations by hearing a heavy sigh in her neighbourhood; and, turning quickly round, she beheld a figure sitting in Gordon Holroyd's chair—the figure of a woman with piercing black eyes. She was dressed in brown; it was “the Brown Lady” again.

Linda had hardly time to distinguish her, for she only gave her one brief glance of horror and amazement; but she noticed that the apparition wore a shawl over its head, and with the same shawl concealed the lower part of its face, in fact, all but the eyes, which had been fixed upon herself with a gaze that a basilisk might have envied.

As Linda took all this in, with a lightning look she gave a half-stifled shriek, and fled out of the room. Her heart beat so fast that it almost choked her, and more for company than anything else she ran up to Mr. Holroyd's room and entered very softly, for she had left him asleep. But he was not asleep now, for he asked, in an audible peevish tone,—

“What's the matter, May? Why are you panting like a hunted hare?”

“Because I've been running, sir,” she answered, coming over to the bedside as she spoke. “Because I have been frightened.”

“By what? A rat?”

“By a figure sitting in the library, a woman with a shawl or a band over her head, and holding a piece of it before her face.”

“The Lady in Brown,” he said. “Well, she will do you no harm.”

“She nearly frightens me to death, and only for one reason I would not stay another night in the house.”

“Hoity toity! that's very fine talking. And pray, what is the reason?”

“It's a secret, sir, that I will only share with you, and you must promise to keep it,” said the girl, boldly resolved to make the plunge now and get it over.

“Must! I don't like that word. Who does this secret concern, May?”

“You and me—only you and me.”

“Well, out with it!”

“You must prepare for a surprise, sir, a great surprise,” she said, trying to steady her shaking voice. “I have reason to know that your daughter's child is still alive.”

“No—no—no!” he exclaimed, grasping the bedclothes tightly, like a man in pain.

“Yes,” she went on, with pale lips and a low, hurried voice, “and that I am she.”

“No—impossible!” said the old man, violently.

“I beseech you to listen to me for a few moments with patience,” said the girl, kneeling down suddenly, and taking his hand. “I am said by all who knew her to be the living image of your daughter. My age tallies with the age of her child. I know no parents. I was brought up in obscurity purposely, and among the scanty possessions left to me by my guardian are two articles that belonged to your daughter—a necklace of coral and a little ring. They were both recognised by Squire Daecres.”

“Anything more?” said the old man, feebly. “Where are your proofs?”

“Some were destroyed; but some are in your brother's keeping. His agitation when he first saw me and his anxious questionings awakened my suspicions, and an hour ago I was in the library searching for a book you wished me to read to you—a book on poisons—and Mr. Holroyd and his son came in and talked in the dark, not knowing that I was present.”

“And you listened?”

“Yes. I could not help it. They were talking about me. Your nephew said that Squire Daecres was coming to speak to you about me, and suggest that you would place

the matter in the hands of detectives, and thus trace out my history. There were no particulars of your grandchild's death—no certificate?”

“But all this is raving and nonsense. Have you done?”

“No,” she went on, rather tremulously. “I heard Mr. Isaac Holroyd say that I was your granddaughter, that he was aware of the fact, but that you or I should never know it, for if you did he would be a beggar.”

“And what else did he say?”

“I would rather not tell you. That is all they said of me.”

“Girl, if you are my granddaughter, obey me!” said the old man, solemnly.

“They said—they said that you were very rich. They said that you could not live long. They speculated on—on your death.”

“Oh, they did that, did they? Ring the bell for Leech.”

“Leech,” he said, as that ancient servitor came into the room, “do you see Miss May there?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Be eyes for me for once. Look at her and tell me if she is like anyone you ever saw? Tell the truth.”

Leech hesitated for a moment, and then said,—

“No offence, sir, but I can only see what all the world sees. She's the born copy of Miss Arabella. When I first saw her coming in at the hall-door you might have knocked me down with a straw.”

“Come nearer, child,” said the old man, “and let me pass my hand over your face.”

“Yes,” he said. “Yes, Arabella's features. If you are her daughter, Heaven has sent you to me in my old age and infirmity, and has been good to me beyond what I deserve. You shall bring your poor little proofs, your necklace and ring, and to-morrow we shall put the police on the trace. You have an address in my desk—the address on the letter—Margery-terrace, Hammersmith, was it? and from that they can work the clue; but it's twenty years ago—twenty years ago—and before I accept all you say I must have some talk with my brother. If he is innocent of this charge you are out, you'll understand that. There are two sides to every story.”

“Yes. But you promised to keep my secret. Surely you can ask questions without betraying me?”

“Yes, I can do that. I scarcely believe that my own only brother would have made away with—kidnapped and concealed—my granddaughter, in order to succeed to the estate himself. Such villainy is only known upon the stage! Go down, now, and send him up to me alone.”

Mr. Isaac Holroyd received the invitation to visit his brother with great pleasure, and followed Leech to the sick room with joyful alacrity. He could judge the patient's chances for himself for one thing, and he would endeavour to borrow money for another.

His brother was wonderfully better; his breathing was no longer oppressed; his voice was clear and sharp as he said,—

“Well, Isaac, I hear you are going to town to-morrow, and I thought it would be no harm to have a talk with you.”

“No harm—no harm at all!” said Isaac, sitting down and rubbing his long, thin hands.

“Lying here, thinking of my latter end, and all my sins, my mind goes greatly to Arabella. Are you quite certain, Isaac, that there was no mistake about the child—the orphan—that it did die?”

“No—no mistake, I am sorry to say!”

“Then it did die? You are sure of that?”

“I'll swear it did! What makes you go back to such strange suspicions now?”

“Dreams, Isaac—dreams. I often reproach myself that there was so little interest taken about the baby. It was my heiress; it ought to have been brought down and buried here. Where was it interred?”

“Oh!—I'm sure I can't recollect at this moment.”

“But you will recall the place to your mind, won't you?”

“Yes, yes!—only give me time!”

“I mean to put a stone up. And you will get the burial certificate and certificate of death in due form. You might manage that when you are in town to-morrow for a few days, will you?”

“Certainly. I'll do everything—everything in my power,” faltered Isaac, in a low, constrained sort of voice. “And there is something I want you to do for me—a favour,” he added. “In short, my money is locked up in so many enterprises that I am greatly—greatly hampered for some floating cash—some ready capital. As I am situated, my hands are tied. There have been heavy failures too, and we have been hard hit; in short, what would be no inconvenience to you, and—of course, I'd give you ample security—would be a tremendous boon to me.”

“I always thought you were a wealthy man, Isaac,” said his brother, coldly. “You had your own fortune, and your wife was rich.”

“I am!—I am! but my capital, as I tell you, is locked up in many things that yield little interest. A certain sum of ready-money would treble itself in three years' time in my hands.”

“And that sum?”

“Well, business is business. I could not do with less than fifteen thousand; and I'd guarantee five per cent.—that's understood.”

“Yes,” said the blind man, sharply; “and it's also understood that I won't lend you a penny!—not a penny! Sell out the funds, indeed, to bolster up your rotten business! No, no! I may be a blind man, but I am not a fool!”

“No. But I am your next heir, and inherit all you possess. It would make little difference to you to give me the part of that inheritance now; there would be no folly in such an act, nothing but pure brotherly kindness!” said Mr. Isaac, in his most unctuous voice.

“Well, it's an act that I am not going to commit! I feel better than I have done for months. I was reared in a sensible fashion, so were you—out of bed at six every morning and into a tub of cold water. We are a hale and long-lived family! My grandfather was ninety-five when he died! Why should I not live another twenty years? And, whether I do or not, be sure of one thing—that as long as I have breath in my body I'll keep my money in my own hands!”

“Oh, well; of course, you have power to do as you please with your own!” said the other, with great humility, but a deep sorrow on his face. “But I think you forget that I am your kin—your only brother. You might stretch a point?”

“No I won't—and there's an end of it! Let us change the subject, and talk of something else.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THIS was heavy news for his listener, and after a few hypocritical words, embodying hypocritical regrets and wishes, he went back to the oak-room a sadder and a wiser man.

“Well! how's the old gentleman?” said his son, briskly.

“Much better—almost convalescent, declares that he is going to live for the next twenty years.”

“Whew! That's a bad hearing.”

“Yes! and I'll tell you one to match it. He has got his suspicions about that girl, and had me up merely to cross-examine me about the child's death. I've been commissioned to find out where it's buried, and to bring back the copy of its burial certificate.”

“That you can easily manage?”

“I'm not at all so sure that I shall be able

to manage it at all, but I must try and put him off in some way, and we must get the girl out of the house, by hook or by crook, or we shall be ruined," and Mr. Isaac bent his head upon his breast, and gave himself up to serious meditation. His son knew his moods and was silent; his grey-headed father was busily engaged in hatching some clever scheme—a scheme which would benefit them both!

Mr. Isaac Holroyd never breathed a word of his having endeavoured to borrow money, and his son, thus totally unprepared, subsequently fell into a pit blindfold.

Among the letters he received the following morning was one from a man with whom he lived. Whilst in town he was one of his particular chums, whom he had entrusted with the execution of a very delicate commission, and is ran thus,—

"DEAR HOLROYD,—It's no use, I've seen Cook, and he utterly refuses the dibs. It's neck or nothing with you now, and if you can't pay up within ten days you'd better bolt. Samuel, the Jew, has bills of yours for four thousand and odd pounds, and won't renew. There's not a penny to be raised here for love or anything else. They know that you are on your last legs. Why don't you put the screw on your old uncle? I hear the estate brings in ten thousand a year, and that he does not spend ten hundred. Make him shell out. If he won't, you know the consequences better than does yours truly,—Tom LARKWORTHY."

Gordon Holroyd tore this letter to pieces, and threw it angrily into the fire, and then stood with his elbows on the chimney-piece, leaning his head on his hand. His last wild hope of renewing bills and raising money was shattered, and unless the old blind miser upstairs gave him a helping hand (this was how he thought of his uncle), he and ruin stood stood literally face to face.

Six thousand pounds would free him for the present, and, after all, what would such a sum be to his uncle, whose income and savings were so large? He would never feel the loss of it, and might just as well give it to him now as later. He miscalculated entirely his uncle's feelings with regard to his money. He thought that, like many saving people, he would part with a cheque, a mere commonplace looking bit of paper, conveying nothing to the touch, whilst he could not endure to part with ten sovereigns, but he was mistaken.

Old Mr. Holroyd, during all his years of darkness, had reared up one comfort for himself—his money. Day by day his love for it grew stronger. His solemn interviews with his man of business were the white stones in his life, and he knew to a halfpenny how his account stood at his bankers. He kept a couple of hundred sovereigns, along with all his bonds, and will, and leases, and family documents, in a strong box in his bedroom, and these he sometimes got out and fingered over.

There was no concealing the fact that old Mr. Holroyd was a miser, and loved money passionately for its own sake—not for what it could do, or what it could purchase.

The same day that Gordon Holroyd was pacing the damp shrubbery walks with his hands in his pockets, literally at his wits' ends, Linda May had been despatched into the village to get a prescription made up at the chemist's, and with a message to Dr. Gaspard's. Her friend, his sister, inveigled her into her sanctum, and insisted on her partaking of an early cup of tea, and talking over this beverage whiled away more than half-an-hour, and the grey twilight of a winter's evening had begun to close in ere Miss Gaspard's visitor had left her hall door.

She carried the bottle of medicine in her hand—or rather in her muff. In this muff she also tightly clasped a purse containing some money, ten sovereigns, for which she had got a cheque cashed at the grocer's. It was money of Mr. Holroyd's, to be handed over to Mrs. Glubb for useful household expenses. The two visitors made a considerable difference in the weekly bills!

It was a dull, disagreeable afternoon, and getting darker every moment, and Linda stepped out quickly, with her head rather bent against the bitter raw east wind. She was coming to a part of the road that she particularly disliked—nay, dreaded. It was where the demesne of Carriabrooke began, and ran along bordering the footpath for more than a mile without even the break of a lodge gate!

On the opposite side of the way was a large stretch of fields—empty even of stock this wintry weather, and not a house in sight. No lonelier bit of road could be found in the whole county, and no road within miles with such a bad name. There were tales of robberies on dark nights, of garroters, of sudden and mysterious whistles heard from behind the high demesne wall, and then of vain attempts at escape from ruffians running up and closing in their victim from opposite directions.

These tales came home to Linda now most painfully, and her heart beat quite loudly. Though she had at present no definite reason for fear, she had never been out so late on this road before, and never would again. How foolish she had been to allow herself to be beguiled by Annie Gaspard's Indian tea, and interesting little tattle!

Just as she made this excellent resolution she was startled by hearing a sort of scrambling noise—a kind of rattle and a jump—not far behind her. She glanced nervously over her shoulder, and saw to her horror a great big man, like a navvy out of work, about fifty yards behind her, on the footpath. He had just scrambled over the demesne wall! She looked again, the light was still quite good enough to make him out—a tall, very broad-shouldered man, with a red, stubbly beard, long boots, a fur cap, a short coat, with a blue jersey underneath. He was not going towards the village; he was coming her way—coming after her! His heavy boots sounded nearer and nearer every second. Oh, if he were only past! Something in his look made her feel excessively uneasy. A chill mistrust crept over her, her heart beat louder and faster than ever. Should she run?

No, that would be foolish, said prudence, but she nevertheless increased her pace until it was first cousin to a run; and still, fast as she went, she could not increase the distance between her and those awful, haunting, following footfalls. She nearly screamed out loud, when all at once those heavy steps broke into a long, lurching run. Impelled by terror that she could no longer control she broke into a run also, but ere she had gone twenty yards the man was beside her, and called out in a gruff voice,—

"It ain't a bit of good!" he said, with a low guttural laugh.

She collapsed into a walk at this speech. Her knees were literally trembling under her; but she summoned up her courage with a desperate effort, and looking the man in the face, said,—

"What do you want?"

"Well, for one thing, I want that ere purse out of your nice little muff! I saw you in at the grocer's. I saw a good many shiners a-going into it. So hand it over, my pretty young lady."

"I cannot," said the girl, firmly. "If the money was my own it would be different; but it's not it's Mr. Holroyd's! All I have of my own is seven and sixpence! Will you take that?"

"Yes, as well as the other," he answered, with a grin. "Come, hand it all over without any palaver! You must, you know. This is just the spot for the job—nice and lonely! You might screech yourself black in the face, and not a soul to hear you! I calculated on that, you see, my dear, and I'm willing to do the business as pleasant as possible! Just hand over the coin, any rings and brooches you've got on and your watch, and we'll part the best of friends!"

As he concluded he approached and

attempted to illustrate his sentiments by giving her a chuck under the chin; but she dealt him a violent and unexpected push which sent him reeling off the footpath, and fled away down the road at the top of her speed. But it was not a bit of use, and she knew it in her frantic fear. For fully half a mile longer that great wall stood between her and help. The ruffian's long strides soon overtook her. He was in a towering passion now, and seizing her fiercely said,—

"You shall pay for this."

As he clatched her arm she could not restrain a piercing scream. This made him more savage than ever.

"Hold your row," he said, giving her a violent shake. "Another word out of you, and I cut your throat!" and he suddenly exhibited a large clasp knife, with a white handle, and opening it displayed a broad, strong, murderous looking blade. "Hand out the money at once, you little squealing fool!"

Linda with tremulous hands began to draw out the purse. He snatched her muff away, and seized it, opened it rapidly, and then thrust it in his pocket.

"Now your watch!"

"I have none!" she stammered, faintly.

"Show! Take off that coat till I see! Turn out your pockets!"

Linda's agonised ears at this moment caught another sound; the clip-clip, clip-clip of a horse trotting towards them. She would delay! She would make time, and she began to fumble in her pockets very slowly.

"None of those games! Come, look sharp, or I'll show you something sharp!" he exclaimed, with a blood-curdling oath.

The horse came nearer and nearer, as she tremulously turned out her pocket and handed over her brooch. The horseman was quite close. In the dusk he might pass them, and, unmindful of her peril from the white-handled knife, she suddenly screamed out "Help! help!" at the top of her voice.

Ere the last "help" had died away the robber made a plunge at her and struck her in the arm, burying the knife in the sealskin jacket and her warm winter dress, but inflicting only a slight wound.

The trot had now been changed for a gallop, and the rider was beside them, a slightly-made horseman in hunting-dress, returning weary and splashed after a long run with the fox-hounds.

In a second he was off his horse, and had the great lurching miscreant by the throat. The navvy tried to shake him off, and tried in vain.

Together they wrestled to and fro on the wet and greasy pathway. For the rider, though less powerful built, was a wiry young man, and had evidently sipews of iron.

No one could tell how the matter would end. The girl stood by, leaning against the wall, sick and powerless. She felt the warm blood trickling down her arm quite fast. She felt as if she was going to faint.

All at once the struggling pair beside her tripped; at least the hunter did, caught his spur in the edge of the footpath and fell over, carrying the navvy with him in his fall.

The latter had the best of it now—the upper hand in every respect. The white-handled knife, conspicuous by its colour, lay in the mud, almost within easy reach of the ruffian's arm.

He knelt on the breast of his fallen foe, and stretched out a long, hairy hand to take hold of it. He would slit this gay rider's throat from ear to ear, empty his pockets, do for the girl too, and make off across the fields. This was his mental programme.

But Linda somehow guessed at his design. Sick and faint as she felt she rushed forward and put her foot on the knife, pushed it farther away, whilst the would-be murderer snatched at her dress with furious hands; but his frantic efforts were useless.

She quickly stooped, picked up the weapon,

and flung it over the wall. She was not nearly so much frightened now.

She felt comparatively brave since that was gone; and, indeed, at that instant a sound of wheels was heard, and with an oath the thief sprang up, dashed across the road, jumped the hedge, and was lost to sight among the evening mists.

Linda's rescuer staggered to his feet, and she recognised him the as Captain Daoces. His hat was knocked off, his tie was gone, his coat was torn, and he was a little breathless, as he gasped out,—

"Miss May, I think? I hope you are not hurt?"

"No; not much! But he has gone off with all Mr. Holroyd's money. Ten pounds!"

"Oh! that's nothing; but I'm afraid he gave you a cut with a knife. Here, hullo, you people!" to a tax-cart that was coming up.

It proved to be a farmer going home with Captain Daoces' loose hunter tied to the tail of the cart.

In a few hurried sentences Captain Daoces painted the situation, described the man, and suggested that he and the farmer should give chase at once, leaving Miss May in charge of the cart (if she felt equal to it); but this suggestion was opposed by the farmer as a mere wild-goose errand in the dark; and by Linda, who would not remain alone on that spot for the wealth of the Indies!

"Tell you what will do," said the farmer. "You get up in my tax cart, miss, and I'll drive you home. We will lay the business before the police in the morning. It's their affair, and if what the gentleman, who I take to be Captain Daoces, says is right, the man as robbed you is Soapy Sam, a desperate character. The police have been a wanting of him this many a day!"

Linda was about to avail herself of the farmer's offer, and accept a lift home, but all at once the tax-cart seemed to go up and down the road, to wave about; and she went off into what is called a "dead" faint for the second time in her life.

The fright, the mental agony, and the loss of blood all combined to this conclusion. When she came to herself she was lying on the damp pathway, with her head resting against Captain Daoces' shoulder.

A lamp from the tax-cart was being flared by the farmer before her eyes, whilst he endeavoured to force some of the contents of Captain Daoces' hunting-flask between her locked teeth.

"That's right!" he exclaimed, as she opened her eyes. "She's a coming round. Take a good swallow of this, miss!" and by a dexterous turn of his wrist he emptied half a wine-glass of raw whisky down her throat.

She felt breathless, speechless, as if she had swallowed a red-hot poker, and gasped and gasped till the farmer said,—

"Tis well seen you are not used to it," and he grinned. "Best thing will be to take you home. I live about ten minutes drive down the next lane. My old woman will staunch your arm, and I'll take you home safe and sound by and-by."

Soon after this she was able to stand, and tottered to the tax cart, and climbed up, assisted by the two men.

Captain Daoces, instead of turning homeward, trotted along beside her, saying,—

"I must see if a surgeon is wanted. I must see you safe into Carriabrooke. I must look after you, Miss May."

"It's very kind of you," she faltered; "but—"

"But I am not going to forget that you saved my life. Yes; if you had not pounced upon the knife and flung it over the wall with great presence of mind that ruffian would soon have settled me; and after all, though at times I wish I had never been born, when it comes to the pinch, and a great hulking scoundrel kneeling on your chest, and you feel his hot breath on your face, and see his great ugly claw feeling for a knife to cut

your throat like a sheep or a calf, life is sweet, and you don't want to lose it."

All this was not said on the dark, cold high road, but murmured privately to Linda in Farmer Meadows's cosy parlour, after buxom Mrs. Meadows had bathed Linda's arm, and bandaged it skilfully, and gone to prepare what she considered a panacea for every wound—mental and physical—"a strong cup of tea."

The farmer was relating the adventure to two gaping girls and a ploughman in the kitchen, and for the moment Linda and her companion were alone in this quaint little room, with a pair of red china dogs on the chimney-piece, a queer old bureau filled with books, a straight-back sofa, covered with shiny chintz, and a few old straight-backed chairs, and a nice bright fire in the grate.

"You and I, Miss May, can never be quite ordinary acquaintances—or, if I may say, ordinary friends—at least, you cannot be that to me. Only for you I would be lying dead, probably on the kitchen-table, with a sheet over me, and terrified people coming in to look timidly at the murdered man!"

"You think too much of what I did; it was nothing!"

"No? I value my life higher than you imagine, and I admire pluck and presence of mind. If ever I can do you a good turn, if ever you want help, remember that you have a friend in me. May I be your friend, Miss May?"

"You may indeed!" she answered, looking at him sadly, with a pallid face. "I have not many friends. Heaven knows I want one badly!"

Well, you need never say that again, for as long as I live you have one in me; and, if need be, I'll come from the other end of the world to serve you! Now I must be going; I hear the tax-cart coming round for you. I'll ride over to-morrow morning to inquire how you are. You had better start at once, or they will be getting anxious about you."

"No one is ever anxious about me," she said, rising; "but Mr. Holroyd will be anxious about his money."

Mr. Holroyd had been extremely uneasy about his ten pounds, and also about Linda. It was pitch dark, and long past six o'clock when she drove up to the big entrance door.

The news of the reason of her delay went through the house like wildfire, and turned Gordon Holroyd's thoughts away from a very unpleasant channel.

Mr. Holroyd himself bore his loss with unexpected fortitude, and made the heroine of the adventure sit by him, and relate every incident most minutely, whilst he breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the robber and would-be murderer, "Soapy Sam."

(To be continued.)

JUDITH.

—o:—

CHAPTER XII.—(continued.)

THE mere suspicion made Judith's breath come more quickly, and her eyes flash; all her strength of purpose evaporating at once, leaving her paroled with the weakness of curiosity, and an unconquerable longing to solve the question once for all.

With the idea of satisfying this craving to know—even though knowledge were suffering, and that of the intensest kind—she went to where Winifred was sitting on the verandah outside the drawing-room, among the geraniums and palms, with the inevitable small white dog curled up on her knees.

She looked up smiling.

"Are you going to bring your work out here?" she asked.

"No, I have come to talk!"

"And you have decided on the subject?" asked Winifred, with a little trilling laugh,

amused at the determined manner with which her intention was made clear.

"About friendship!" said Judith, too seriously disposed to even pretend to share the merriment her words had evoked.

Winifred made a comical face,

"Oh! that is rather an inexhaustible subject!"

"I only want to understand the rudiments. I want to know if these friendships one sees in India are really friendships pure and single-minded?"

"You mean friendships between man and woman?"

Judith nodded her head.

"Oh! that is a fraud anywhere, don't you think?"

She spoke half jestingly, then seeing the light fade from Judith's face suddenly, as though from the pain of some actual hurt, she reconsidered her hasty speech, and added slowly,—

"At least people vary so, that it is difficult to make a rule that will apply to everyone alike."

"Tell me all about it, just exactly what you think!" said Judith, in a low voice.

"I don't know what to think. I never have known what to think, and all the experience I have gained only served to puzzle me the more. In this country one sees so much of friendship, or what is called so, and seems on the whole, to be a fairly good substitution for the real thing, and—"

"Yes?" inquiringly.

"I don't think my sentence has a conclusion, for I never came to any. First I was puzzled, and utterly unable to account for what I saw, then I disbelieved in the integrity of every second person I met; then came a stage, during which I said the evil existed only in my own eyes, and that people must be as good and true as they seemed; and now—"

She paused a moment, and looked a little quizzically into the bright blue eyes fixed so questioningly upon her own.

"Now I have gone back to my earliest state—the state of doubt and indecision."

"The women I have met—" began Judith slowly.

"Now" said Winifred archly, "I think we are coming to what you really want to know. I was sure it could not be people in general who had aroused your interest, but someone in particular. Who is it, Judith?"

"Mrs. Trevor, for instance," was suggested evasively.

"A very good little woman on the whole, though desperately vain. She would not be happy without one or two 'friends'; yet I never heard of her doing anyone any harm."

"And—and Mrs. Hare?" trying with all her might to keep the intense eagerness she felt out of her face and voice, but only succeeding partially in her object.

Winifred looked grave.

"I don't wish to say anything unkind about anyone," she said hesitatingly; "but I don't like her. I cannot trust her. I always remember some lines I read once:—

"Beware of her fair hair, for she excels

All women in the magic of her locks;
And when she winds them round a young man's neck

She will not ever let him go again."

Judith's eyes were fixed upon her face, wondering and awed.

"You—you don't think she is capable of friendship pure and simple, as I said?"

A slow, not quite decisive head shake was the reply.

"I—I am not sure. Most people would class her with Mrs. Trevor, but I do not. I have looked deeper, or had more opportunity of judging. You see she is often here. My mother likes her. There is some subtle charm about her, I suppose; there is some attraction about anyone born in the purple my mother has never been able to resist. And Mrs. Hare is an Honourable, you know," with that slight

accent of bitterness which now and then surprised Judith, who knew her to be almost too amiable by nature.

"And Captain St. Quentin, has he come under that subtle charm?" her lips curling for the space of one second in attempted scorn, then drooping at the corners in piteous uncertainty.

"I have always heard he admired her very much."

"And—and her husband?"

"He goes his own way, and lets her go hers. He is always playing polo, or away at race-meetings, and Captain St. Quentin is a great friend of his as well."

Judith half turned away, fidgeting with her feet against the bars of her chair, though her fingers were folded tightly together, and lay motionless in her lap.

The big eyes that watched her intently took quiet notice of her actions, and had sufficient knowledge to read their purport aright.

A thin, white hand was laid on Judith's clasped ones, and the sweetest, most sympathetic voice said gently,—

"Don't be angry if I guess what is troubling you. I have feared it ever since that evening we went to the Club; and if only you would listen to my advice—"

"Oh; I will listen!" said Judith, trying to take jestingly what she felt was already passing beyond the limits of a joke.

"Then don't think any more of Captain St. Quentin. It is not because he has been so friendly with Mrs. Haze that I warn you, for I can't think him to be such—such an idiot as to hesitate in a choice between you two. You could easily win him from her if you have not already done so; but, Judith, I don't believe that he is worth the winning. He is too facile, too weak; he would only make you unhappy in the end!"

From the still averted face she could guess nothing, not even determine whether her words had given offence or no. Only the monotonous friction of Judith's feet against the chair showed that she had heard and was moved, one way or the other, by what she had heard.

"You are not vexed with me?" anxiously.

"Vexed!" turning two very pink cheeks, two very blue eyes, suddenly in the direction of the speaker. "I could never be vexed, I think, at anything you said, and in this case I am half inclined to agree with you, but—but—"

"I know!" said Winifred, the deepest tenderness lying in the hastily-spoken and apparently irrelevant words.

For a whole minute the two girls sat silent with clasped hands, tears very near their eyes, one from pain, and the other from instinctive appreciation of that pain. Then Judith, quicker to recover, though hers was the actual cause for sorrow, loosened and withdrew her fingers as she stood up.

"I have to finish some letters for the post," she said, and went indoors, looking back to smile reassuringly into her friend's troubled face.

It was English mail-day, and the half finished letter she had been writing lay as she had left it on the table; yet no, not the same, not as she had left it.

The fleeting colour faded altogether from Judith's face, as she realised that someone had touched her letter—read it, perhaps.

She had come to the end of the page, and it was while waiting for it to dry that she had felt impelled to go to Winifred, to have her doubts either justified or set at rest. Purposely, because the ink was very pale, and the paper of that thin texture which is used for foreign correspondence, she had not blotted it, but now it lay face downwards on the pad.

Several times before had the fancy come into her head that her letters were tampered with, but now suspicion became certainty, and she could not control her excitement—the creepy feeling that is inseparable from

the idea that anyone is using underhand means to circumvent or hurt us.

It took some moments for her to regain her self-possession. It was even then only by an effort she could force herself to look about, and see if anyone was concealed near, for the unknown danger is the most terrifying of all, and the blow that has not yet fallen more dreaded than any actual calamity, it requiring less courage to face an unquestionable peril with presence of mind, than to combat any imaginary fear.

With the greatest relief Judith assured herself at last that whoever had been in her room was gone now, and it was more in the hope of persuading herself that she was mistaken in her surmise that presently she strolled out of the open French window, and walked round the corner of the house.

Only two people were in sight, Winifred's ayah and the Madrasai bearer, the former gesticulating violently, and speaking very fast, the latter apparently impassive, even uninterested in what she said, or perhaps unbelieving.

When they saw Judith they separated; the ayah going into her young mistress's room, the bearer walking away quickly in the direction of the servants' houses. Judith's impulsive call to him elicited no response, and she did not repeat it.

He had always seemed so friendly disposed towards herself that she could not suspect him of meddling with her letters for any wrong purpose. Moreover, he had warned her to look up all her things, a warning that she had hitherto disregarded, but now meant to observe.

The strongest argument in the other's favour was her stupidity.

When first she came, Winifred had placed the woman's services at her disposal; but Judith, who was quick-tempered, and also a little particular in the arrangement of her possessions, could not tolerate her unorganised way of going to work; could not sit patiently while her shoes were being put on the wrong feet, or stand quiescent under the knowledge that the slowness with which her gown was being laced up the back was no guarantee that an eyelet-hole would not be overlooked, and the ordeal have to be re-endured.

Besides, her purposeless wanderings about the room, in and out of season, annoyed her, and she had at last come to an arrangement by which the ayah was only to enter once during the day, and that in the early morning, therefore unless she had deliberately disobeyed this order she could not be responsible for what had occurred.

Despairing of finding any clue, Judith went back to her room, and hastily finishing her letter, pushed it into an envelope, feeling that she could write no more that day.

A comprehensive glance over what she had already set down had assured her that there was nothing she would mind the whole world knowing; it was the idea that someone had reason to be interested in what she wrote, and was unscrupulous enough to avail him or herself of the opportunity to gratify the curiosity that disturbed her; the thought of these natives creeping about so stealthily, with their bare feet, that they could defy detection, made her shudder. And yet what interest could one of the servants have in perusing her letters, even if their knowledge of English was sufficient?

It seemed to her as if they could only be the tools, the paid agents, of someone else, but, if so, whom?

Hastily she put on her hat and coat, determining to go out and despatch the letter herself; which she did.

It was as she was returning from the post-office that something occurred, seeming to her so very strange that it diverted her mind to another matter.

Mr. Johnson was riding just before her, and as she came up had found some fault with his horse gear, and was launching out into abuse

of his syce in the most fluent, if not purest Hindustani.

In one month it was impossible he could have acquired such command of the language, and her former suspicions, that he was only acting a part, seemed confirmed. This was not his first visit to India; he had probably, in spite of his being a professed "globetrotter," lived in the country some years.

She kept carefully out of his sight, entering the house by a different gate, and he did not guess then that he was self betrayed.

CHAPTER XIII.

CUT OFF FROM ALL HOPE.

THE afternoon sun was shining into the Commissioner's handsome drawing-room, and its slanting beams lay in bars across the soft cashmere rug and embroidered nundahs that covered all the floor.

Tea had been over for some time, and Judith stood drawing on her long tan gloves, and glancing every now and then impatiently towards the verandah, where Winifred and Mr. Johnson were talking together, the usual hour for their going out being already passed.

Mr. Sherston occupied the hearth rug, and had the *Pioneer* in his hand, from which he now and then read out extracts about their mutual friends; the fact that one had obtained the new order for Distinguished Service, and another been granted fifteen months' furlough on urgent private affairs, eliciting very little remark from his wife, who interested as she was ordinarily in such matters, to-day had no eyes or ears for any but the one thing.

For four years—ever since Charlie Stamer had met an accidental death, in fact—her daughter had had no serious wooer, and it had almost seemed as though she would be destined to end her life an old maid; this being a reproach that would have been felt by Mrs. Sherston very keenly.

Now that this stigma was likely to be removed she could not but look upon the inter-venor with enthusiastic gratitude, that blinded her to any objections which, some years ago, she would have been quick enough to discover.

He was rich, and therefore practicable as a husband, and if the circumstances of his birth and parentage did not, perhaps, admit of a very strong light being thrown upon them, at least he was thoroughly English; he was not dark, which is the worst of all abominations to anyone who has resided in the East.

It is, I believe, true that the natives regard a mixture of race with equal disfavour, and for the Eurasians neither one nor the other has a good word to say.

The wife of a popular Maharajah, whose tastes and habits are essentially English, always clings to her native style of dress, for fear of looking like a half caste, as she says; and certainly the soft rich materials that fall in unbroken folds, and the delicate lace that falls modestly round her head and shoulders, after the fashion of the national *saree*, is eminently becoming and picturesque.

Mr. Sherston was a believer in Lord Ripon's policy, and a follower in a mild, unostentatious way; but Mrs. Sherston was on this subject a strong Conservative, and obdurate in her prejudice against every one of colour. To her servants she was uniformly just and considerate, if not indulgent; to the more prosperous class of native she was overbearing to a degree, and could never be brought to understand, in spite of her long experience of matters and manners Eastern the difference that lay between a Rajah, whose ancestry was of centuries growth, and the ordinary upstart Baboo.

There is a story told of her with infinite English, how once when she arrived late at some outdoor entertainment, and found every garden-seat engaged, she marched up to the young ruler of a very large and prosperous

province, and haughtily bade him "jou," which is in Hindustani the imperative tense of the verb "to go." The matter was smoothed over afterwards by the Commissioner, and she herself always displayed additional civility to this victim of her prejudices; but the incident is characteristic of her feelings on the subject—feelings that I may add are unusual to anyone in her position. If her daughter's case had been ten times more hopeless she would never have allowed her to encourage anyone who was not at least "real English."

But, in this instance she was genuinely pleased, and knowing what was taking place at that moment felt very anxious as to the issue.

Though Judith had good reason to understand what was impending, she never dreamed that the crisis was just then; it was only natural impatience that caused her to look now and then in the direction where Winifred so unaccountably lingered.

Stretched full length upon the floor, his head resting on his two front paws, Dandy waited eagerly, his bright black eyes fixed upon the door; and he jumped up barking with delight when Mr. Johnson at last entered the room, and Winifred followed.

Mr. Johnson was not slow to explain what it was had kept them out there.

"I have won your daughter's consent," he said, addressing himself to the Commissioner. "She has promised to be my wife so soon as you approve."

Mrs. Sherston expressed her delight with the volubility that was customary to her, kissing her daughter on both cheeks, and shaking Mr. Johnson's hand with effusion when she congratulated him.

Judith, distressed as she was herself and disappointed, could not but notice the Commissioner's manner, which struck her as very strange, especially as the two men were apparently such close friends. He deliberately turned his back at first under the pretence of folding up the newspaper and putting it away; but notwithstanding the momentary respite gained he was deadly white still when he faced them, and the answer that was expected from him did not come.

"We are waiting for your blessing, Sherston," his would-be son-in-law reminded him, with an unpleasant smile.

"I have told you what I thought before. Of course I wish you all happiness," he stammered out under this pressure.

"And me, father?" said Winifred, in a tremulous tone.

"Heaven bless you, child!" he answered folding her to his breast; while in a muffled, whisper he added, fervently, "and help you!"

Perhaps Mr. Johnson caught the words, low as they were spoken, for his eyes had rather a malicious gleam as he said, with an attempt at gaiety,—

"I think, Sherston, you and I had better take a walk and leave the ladies to talk it over and decide the earliest date for the event. I don't suppose we shall quarrel about settlements or anything of that sort."

The Commissioner made some sort of disclaimer with a sickly smile as he went to find his hat, and Mr. Johnson turned to Judith,—

"Miss Holt has not given us her congratulations yet, nor one good wish!" he reminded her.

"Who am I to congratulate?" disdainfully.

"Oh! that I leave to you," with a careless shrug of the shoulders, yet waiting pertinaciously for her reply.

"Then I shall certainly congratulate you, and wish her——. Well it is rather difficult to know what to wish her!"

Her manner was even more unmistakable than her words, and Mrs. Sherston, who was close enough to overhear, turned to her with a surprised rebuke,—

"My dear Miss Holt, where did you learn that bad habit of trying to say sharp things? It is most unfeminine," she objected,

sternly, and was on the point of saying more when Mr. Johnson broke in hurriedly,—

"Now, I must beg Mrs. Sherston that you will not scold Miss Holt on my account. I quite understand and appreciate her devotion to our dear Winifred, and I cannot expect her to think me worthy of her at first. I shall hope to win her confidence in time."

He spoke in his blandest manner, but an intelligent observer might have noticed a sinister expression in his dark, deeply-set eyes before he drooped them, bowing slightly as he left the room to join Mr. Sherston.

Mrs. Sherston lingered a moment to administer some more sound advice to her daughter's intractable companion; then she, too, went off to put on her clothes. The two girls were left alone.

Winifred was standing near the mantelpiece, not having moved her position nor spoken since her father held her in his arms and practically abandoned her to her fate. Though the thought never took any real form in mind, and she would have indignantly denied it had it been suggested, the feeling was nevertheless there that it had been a sort of Judas-kiss that he had given her, that she was betrayed and cut off from all hope.

She started a little nervously as Judith came up and put her arms about her, but was not actually afraid of anything that might be said in sorrow or reproach, since the worst that could happen had already been.

"How can I congratulate you?" asked Judith, wistfully.

"That is a mere empty form, and in this case I prefer the breach to the observance!" was the quiet answer.

"You are very determined!"

"I am quite resigned, which I daresay will answer the same purpose. Resignation is as good as firmness sometimes."

"I wish you would not talk in that hard way," frowning slightly, "it is not like you."

"Not like the best part of me, perhaps, which is all that you have known. At heart I have always been inclined to bitterness. Even when I do a good action I spoil it by not doing it gracefully."

Judith stared at her blankly.

"Do you call this a good action that you are doing now?" she asked, and then a sudden light broke in upon her, and she drew a long breath.

"I don't exactly know what I meant, nor what I said. I am rather confused still. It is not every day one accepts an offer of marriage. When you come back you will find me more composed, more accustomed to my sense of greatness. You and mamma are going for a drive, to hear the band she said—"

"You are coming too, Winifred?"

"I think not. I think I have heard enough to-day. Here comes mamma. Go and meet her like a dear, good girl, and save me from more—congratulations."

Slowly, even reluctantly, Judith obeyed her wish, though it seemed cruel to leave her alone in so bitter a mood, yet perhaps it was the truest kindness. Reflection must bring her to a more gentle frame of mind, and it was better that she should realise what she had done before absolutely too late to repair the harm. It would have been more natural to one of her temperament to weep and bemoan her hard fate, or even to rebel against the sacrifice that had evidently been demanded of her.

Judith had not as yet sufficient experience of the contradictions that abound in even the most common characters to realise that the weakest are often the most obstinate in carrying out a preconceived plan though their own happiness or that of others depends upon their giving in. She saw plainly, and had suspected before, that this unwelcome suitor was only accepted for the father's sake; but she hoped that it might be proved to Winifred that in so personal a matter her first duty was to herself.

To think it all out thoroughly was impossible with Mrs. Sherston keeping up a running fire of questions and remarks on the

event of the afternoon; she was compelled to discuss, with some show of interest, the surprise which would be certainly felt when the engagement was made known.

When they entered the Club gardens two or three acquaintances of Mrs. Sherston's came up, and were told the news, while Judith was left in peace, to consider what she could do to redeem her promise to save the girl in spite of herself.

She could not stand by and see such a sacrifice consummated, and whatever was to be done must be done quickly, since she had several times distinguished the ominous words, "trousseau and bride cake" in the whispered, excited confidences that were going on beside her. It was evident no time would be lost, and she must be expeditious too.

Someone came up to her side of the carriage, while a well-known voice spoke her name.

Smiling and blushing prettily, she allowed him to take her hand.

Compared with the reality of the impending disaster, all mere sentimental doubts and troubles, seemed fanciful and absurd, and she wanted someone to sympathise with her so badly.

Laurence St. Quentin was relieved at her complaisance. He had expected to have met with a very cool reception after his neglect the other night, for he had seen that she was very proud, perhaps a little vain as well, and had not supposed that she would easily forgive a slight; while if she upbraided him in actual words, or by implication, it would have been very difficult to plead any excuse, or give any reason for his conduct.

But he was careful not to show his surprise. Knowing she was musical he thought the band would be a safe subject to introduce; and Judith was quite prepared to agree with him that the air that was being played then was the prettiest she had ever heard.

Anything that they had listened to together would have sounded sweetly in her ears, and the young Lancer was equally willing to be pleased.

Judith was looking so lovely in her fur that he had some difficulty in restraining the words which would have come naturally to his lips.

He felt very deeply in love, very ready to overcome all obstacles just then; but his moods were not always the same.

Presently he caught the meaning of something Mrs. Sherston was saying, and turned to Judith quickly.

"Is it true? Is she engaged to the man really?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I am afraid so," sadly.

"And you are very sorry; very disappointed?" he went on gently.

She nodded, and bit her trembling lips. The idea was too new, and too utterly distasteful, to allow her to discuss it with equanimity, and it was impossible to say what she thought, Mrs. Sherston being so near.

"Don't fret," he said presently. "I daresay it will not turn out so badly as you fear. She seems to be a very sensible girl, and—and not very deep feelings, I daresay. You must not take it for granted that they will be unhappy because it is not exactly a love-match to begin with."

The horrified expression on her face amused him, but he went on gravely,—

"It has been said by someone—an authority on these matters—that after two or three years it makes very little difference who one has married, whether the person of one's choice or no. In the one case, one discovers unexpected faults, and in the other unexpected virtues."

"But you don't believe that?" letting her eyes rest on him in quick reproach.

"Oh! no. I am not so philosophical. There is only one woman in the world could make me happy."

(To be continued.)

THE MAIDEN OF SPRING.

—o—

Through winter's gate a maid is tripping;
On her brow is spring's bright crown,
While her hand, with wealth o'erflowing,
Drops choice treasures gaily down.
Tiny blades of grass, up springing
From the meads, so brown and bare,
Charmed to life by her sweet coming,
Make earth beautiful and fair.

Bud, and leaf, and germ of blossoms,
From the abiding tree-tops loom;
Glowing life leaps through the forest;
All the orchards burst in bloom;
Flowers, the night of winter sleeping,
Wake, and at her touch, arise,
Dotting vale, and mead, and hill-side,
Breathing incense to the skies.

Merry birds, at her soft wooing,
With their glad notes thrill the air;
Orange groves, on sunny islands,
Waft afar their perfumes rare—
Earth, and sea, and air, all revel
In the gifts this maiden showers
With a lavish hand around her,
Making bright the balmy hours.

In our hearts, like sweet birds, singing,
Hope, and joy, and love will cheer;
In our lives, like bright flowers springing,
Thoughts and deeds will then appear;
In our homes, sweet virtues clinging,
Make our spring last all the year.
Maiden! this the lesson bringing,
Welcome! thou art ever dear.

L. S. U.

DULCE'S INHERITANCE.

—o—

CHAPTER IX.

Ir Nina Dalton had anxiety in leaving Dulce, her misgivings were as nothing compared to those which assailed that poor child as she heard the wheels of Dr. Drake's gig fairly drive away.

It seems to me the active part of life is ever easier than the passive. It is less painful to leave than to be left. Nina had the excitement of her coming discoveries to raise her spirits. Nina had the hope of success to gladden her, but poor Dulce had nothing but a vague longing for Nina's return.

Miss Dalton had not thought it wise to tell her too much for fear of raising false hopes. She had only said a charge of great cruelty had been brought against Noel Bertram, and, if it could only be proved, Dulce need never fear being again advised to marry him.

She sat in a low chair by the fire, this beautiful, violet-eyed heroine of ours, and tried hard to be brave. Naturally, Dulce was no coward, but ever since her father's death her nerves had been terribly shaken, and the fear which she entertained for Bertram was beyond her strength to conquer. All her life she had been loved and cherished.

John Stone had been a very rock of support to her when he was removed; when the man who had sworn he loved her better than all the world deserted her, poor Dulce felt like a frail boat stranded among the rocks. She clung to Nina with a fond trust which the other thoroughly merited; but for the rest of the persons who had to do with her affairs Dulce soon perceived they were not infallible.

Mrs. Leslie, kind and affectionate though she was, knew less of actual workaday life than Dulce herself. The Vicar was much swayed by personal prejudices. Dr. Drake had no authority; and Mr. Clinton, clever lawyer though he was, had yet too much desire for his ward's future wealth to scrutinize Noel Bertram's character very closely.

So that Dulce knew, from his first coming to Stoneleigh, there was no one but Nina who would help her to keep him at a distance. Her task was all the harder, poor girl, from his charm of manner, which won people insensibly to like him, and, hardest of all, because of the power he exercised over her.

If he fixed his eyes on her face and kept them there some minutes all the strength to resist him died away. She hated him, and yet a nameless influence forced her to answer when he spoke and agree to what he proposed.

She was so ashamed of this, so conscious of how hard it would be for others to understand it, that she seldom alluded to her thralldom, even to Nina. And now Nina was gone, and for a whole day and night poor Dulce was left to fight her own battles.

A maid came to ask if she would not come down to luncheon. Mrs. Leslie was just ready for her. Mr. Bertram had ridden out early that morning, and not returned.

"You had better go down, Miss Dulce," said the girl, pleadingly. "It is so dull for you up here!"

Mrs. Leslie greeted her young charge as rapturously as though they had been parted for a year. No servants were in attendance, so the widow was able to relieve her mind by speaking freely.

"The Vicar came to see me this morning, dear, and explained all about last night. It must have been a terrible shock to you, poor child!"

Dulce's eyes begged her to keep silent, but that was the last thing in her thoughts. She dearly loved the sound of her own voice, and it was not often she had such an exciting subject.

"Mr. Bertram behaved nobly the Vicar told me. Ah! Dulce, what a devoted lover he must be, since even the appearance of this—this bad man did not shake his affection! You ought to be very thankful, dear, for such a noble heart."

"Mrs. Leslie," began poor Dulce, a little petulantly, for she was ill and sorely tried, "please don't let us talk about Mr. Bertram. You like him and I never shall, so we can't agree on that subject."

"But it is my duty to speak to you, Dulce," persisted the chaperon. "You have no mother, poor child, and no woman friend but myself. The Vicar thinks after what occurred last night your marriage had better be hastened. In fact, he sees no reason why it should not take place next month, at the close of Mr. Bertram's visit to Stoneleigh."

"I shall never marry Noel Bertram," cried Dulce, "not if he could give me ropes of diamonds. I wish you would understand me, Mrs. Leslie, once for all. I am in earnest. I don't like him, and I will never be his wife."

"My dear, you have been set against him, that's all," replied Mrs. Leslie, with perfect equanimity. "I am sure you have never seemed to dislike him. It has been a pleasure to watch you together; you made such a handsome couple!"

All reply was prevented by Mr. Bertram's own entrance. Evidently he and Mrs. Leslie had met before that day, for they only exchanged smiles.

He went up to Dulce and took her hand.

"I am glad to see you downstairs!"

Dulce devoutly wished she had not come down; she felt herself turn first red, then white.

She tried to draw her hand away, but the lover still held it in his firm clasp.

"You must let me take you for a drive after lunch!" he said, with the quiet air of possession which always exasperated her; "the fresh air will do you all the good in the world."

"I had much rather stay at home."

"But you can't always please yourself," said Noel, with a smile; "and I am sure the drive is best for you. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Leslie?"

"Certainly, Mr. Bertram. Dulce hangs about over the fire a great deal too much."

"I will order the pony carriage in half an hour," said Mr. Bertram, as Dulce rose to go upstairs.

"I do not intend to go."

He looked at her steadily with those keen, cold eyes of his, as though he would read her through and through.

Poor Dulce felt powerless. He had made up his mind she should drive with him, and her efforts to resist were hopeless; the strange mysterious spell was upon her, and she was simply a puppet, which he could move as he pleased.

They set off at half-past three, Dulce looking her prettiest, though a careful mother would not have liked the hectic flush and the feverish brightness of her eyes.

Noel handed her to her seat, and took the reins. There was no groom with them, as Dulce noticed with a shudder. She would gladly have leaped out even at the last moment, but Noel's eye was upon her, and she was compelled to keep her seat. Once off her fear relaxed.

He put forth all his efforts to amuse and divert her. He showed himself only anxious to please her, and called into play, for her benefit, every fascination he could use.

Dulce well-nigh forgot her fears. If only he would always be like this! If only he would always avoid mention of his future wishes she really thought she would not dislike him so much, after all.

They drove on and on until they had left the village far behind them, and were out in the open country.

It was a lovely afternoon, and the fresh air brought relief to Dulce's hot cheeks and throbbing head.

They had gone quite five miles before she bethought herself to ask—

"Where are we going, Mr. Bertram?"

"To the Demon's Cave. I heard you say the other day you had never seen it."

It was one of the lions of the neighbourhood, and in summer was crowded by picnic parties.

The place had a strange legend that two friends—rivals for a girl's hand—had once brought her there to choose between them. She chose, and the rejected one, in a fit of desperation, lured her and her fiancé into one of the gloomy subterranean caves, and while they were lost in love's young dream blocked up the narrow entrance with large stones, so as to make their escape impossible.

Such was the story handed down by tradition, and fondly credited by the villagers.

A rugged pile of stones was still pointed out as the barrier which had prevented the lovers' escape from a living tomb. And people had evidently taken fright, for the entrance to the remaining caves had been made wide and lofty, so as effectually to prevent a repetition of the tragedy.

"To the Demon's Cave!" repeated Dulce; "that is a long way. Why, it will be dark before we get home!"

"Oh, no! We shall be back in plenty of time to welcome Mr. Clinton. See, Dulce, here we are! Let us get out and examine the caves; people say they are well worth a visit."

He made the horse secure, and led her towards the caves.

It was a most desolate spot; not a human creature in sight.

The caves had probably been hewn out centuries before from the giant hill on which they stood.

There was a tradition that in one of them was a winding staircase, leading down to the beach. If so, it must have been long indeed, for they were raised so far above the sea level that they could hardly distinguish the waves.

West Highshire was ten miles inland, and this was the only glimpse of the scene from any point.

Noel spread a rug upon the ground just under the shadow of a rock.

"Sit down."

But a nameless instinct dissuaded her.

"It is cold," she murmured, "and you have come so far. Oh, Mr. Bertram, take me home; I don't like this place, it is so dark and gloomy, and I feel frightened. Let us get into the carriage and go straight home."

"You foolish child!" said Noel, toying carelessly with one of her hands. "Pray, what have you to be afraid of, Dulce?"

"I want to go home."

"I shall go home presently; but first I want to talk to you. I have something important to say."

She trembled from head to foot; shivering, indeed, as though an ice blast had passed over her.

Noel turned up the collar of her jacket and fastened it. He was always very careful of her—even Nina confessed that.

"Dulce, have you seen Mr. Bengough to-day?"

"The Vicar? Oh, no. I was asleep when he came up this morning."

"He promised to speak for me; but, after all, I think I had rather plead my own cause. Dulce, I want you to promise me that next month you will be my wife."

"Never!"

Everything around her seemed to grow misty and indistinct, but she was conscious of an agony of terror—a kind of awful dread even while she spoke her refusal.

Mr. Bertram was in no wise discomfited.

"Why don't you like me?" he demanded, quietly. "Am I to conclude you are still regretting Sir Frederic Dalton's faithlessness?"

Dulce was stung into retort.

"You can conclude what you like. Sir Frederic Dalton and I shall never be more to each other than acquaintances. He deserted me because I was poor; but he told me so frankly. He did not torture and terrify me as you have done."

"Terrify you?" exclaimed Bertram; "you can't know what you are talking of. Why, my only aim is her happiness!"

Dulce found her voice.

"Then leave me in peace," she pleaded. "Even if you feel bound to stay out your month at Stoneleigh why need you molest me? All I ask of you is to leave me alone."

"I must think of you," said Noel, with a slight emphasis. "All I want is for you to be my wife. If you take my name I shall at least have the power to protect you from the man the law calls your father. I will even promise, if you like, to leave you alone at Stoneleigh for six months after our wedding. All I want is the right to claim this little hand."

There was no mistaking his sincerity. He did want to marry her. That much was clear.

"I can't understand you."

"In what am I puzzling?"

"You have nothing in the world to gain by marrying me. You can be rich and prosperous, and yet leave me in peace. When you are master of Stoneleigh you can choose a wife from the noblest names in England. Why should you want a simple country girl who does not love you?"

"Do you love anyone else?"

Dulce evaded the question.

"When I came to Stoneleigh last summer I did not know a young man in the world; since my father's death I have lived in the closest seclusion. As to loving," went on Dulce, firmly, "there must be some women who go through the world heart whole. Well, I think I must be one of those."

"Then you will marry me?"

"I have just told you that I cannot! Mr. Bertram, is it kind, is it manly, to persecute me?"

"Few girls would call it persecution."

"Then go to someone who would appreciate your wealth and the honour of your hand," she returned. "I tell you I cannot."

"We shall see! Dulce, don't you understand that last night's event has made a very great difference in your position?"

"It has given me a bitter enemy, and made me a still more ineligible choice for you."

"It has done more than that. It has made you need protection and help as woman never needed them before. Perhaps in kindness Mr. Stone kept from you Netherton's real character. I tell you the man is a scoundrel!"

"I knew he was wicked," said Dulce gently. "He broke mother's heart."

"And he will break yours if he can."

Dulce shook her head.

"Only the loss or the wickedness of those we love can break our hearts, Mr. Bertram."

"You know this man is a criminal. He has seen the inside of more than one prison."

Dulce shuddered.

"How do you know?"

"I had it from a friend of mine whom Netherton robbed of twenty pounds, by forging his signature to a cheque."

Dulce looked troubled.

"I should like to send him the money. Will you tell me his name?"

"He has been dead for months, Dulce, but the cheque is in existence still; it is in my possession. Netherton knows this, and that I could have him arrested on a charge of forgery. It would be five years' penal servitude."

"And you mean to do it?"

"Not if you are merciful," he said, slowly. "Dulce, don't you see that if you marry me I can protect you against Netherton as no other man can do? He simply dare not offend me! On the other hand, if you send me away, what will you do? The man would be a regular prey upon you. He would leave you no peace until he had robbed you of your little income. He would come to you whenever he was hard up, or down on his luck. You would be exposed to one long persecution!"

"Mr. Clinton would help me!"

"Clinton would tell you to refuse him money, and to have the door shut in his face. If you neglected this advice (and you are so tender-hearted you would neglect it) Clinton would wash his hands of you."

"It is very dreadful," said Dulce, slowly.

"It is like going through life with a heavy burden strapped on to one's shoulders, but other girls have carried such, so why not I?"

"But you have no need to. One word, and you can be my idolized wife, the cherished mistress of Stoneleigh. You say you love no one else. I tell you I am well content to take you, knowing you do not care for me as I do for you. I feel, I know, love like mine must win for itself a return in time."

"I cannot. Do not ask me. It is cruel."

"Cruel to be kind!" he murmured. "Oh, child, think what your life will be like if you refuse!"

"But!" said Dulce, naively, "you said you had a hold over him—that you could make him leave me in peace?"

A strange change passed over Bertram's features. Passion, excitement, and surprise were all contending for the mastery.

"And you think I am made of ice?" he cried, at last; "or do you take me for a stoic? Don't you understand that I want you—that my whole heart cries out for you? As my wife I will do all that life can do to smooth your path; but don't suppose I will do it for the woman who has sent me away as a discarded glove."

Dulce was sitting motionless, with a kind of bitter despair stamped upon her white, still face. Her beautiful eyes were full of a nameless terror. Otherwise she might have been carved in stone.

"I don't know which I shall do!" said Bertram, cruelly. "I may leave Netherton at large, sure that his persecution of you will amply avenge your treatment of me; or I may bring him to account. I can't say. It would be pleasant for you to feel that everyone knew you to be the child of a convicted felon. I don't think in that case I should need to fear seeing a rival happy, unless men are as desperately in love as I am. They shrink

from giving their name to a convict's daughter. No; my revenge is ready! Either Denzil Netherton will make your life a weariness to you, or the shadow of his disgrace shall darken your whole life."

"And you call that love?"

"That is a man's love!"

"Not if he is generous!" cried Dulce, passionately. "A true man would strive to make the life of her he loved happy, even if it were not to be passed with him. My mother wrecked Mr. Stone's every hope, yet she died, soothed by his kindness, and leaving me to his charge. Ah, that if you like was love!"

"It would be wiser to think of the future than the past!" said Noel Bertram, coldly. "This afternoon you must make your choice. Be my idolized wife, or send me from you, knowing that my whole life will be devoted to revenge. There is nothing in the world so pitiless as a love that soon has turned to hatred!"

"But I do not scorn you."

"Your friend, Miss Dalton, does, and you seem to be her apt pupil, I must say!"

The very thought of Nina brought a ray of hope to poor Dulce. Nina was so brave and strong she would be able to undo the web which seemed to have entangled her unhappy friend, and with the memory of Nina came that of Nina's journey.

Dulce was not quite *au fait* about it, but she did know Nina hoped to bring back proofs of such qualities in Mr. Bertram as would settle the question of his marrying herself.

"Would you not wait?" said Dulce, with feverish restlessness. "You cannot be in such a terrible hurry! Let me give you my answer to-morrow night. What difference can four-and-twenty hours make?"

"I will not wait!" he said, promptly. "It is your own decision I want, not whatever reply Miss Dalton chooses to dictate to you!"

He had understood the reason of her prayer for delay, and refused it. Poor Dulce could think of no other plea. She sat there shivering as much from fright as cold; she knew that Noel Bertram was angry with her, and here she was at his mercy in this lonely, desolate place, more than ten miles from home.

It was getting late, too. The February sun had sunk in the west; his last rays gave a kind of fiery tint to the distant water; very soon darkness would have fallen upon the earth.

"Oh, take me home! take me home!" she cried. "It is so cold and dreary. Mrs. Leslie will be so frightened. Please take me home!"

"Your answer?" he demanded, coolly.

"First give your answer, if you please!"

A woman of the world would have temporized with him, and given hopes even if she did not mean to fulfil them. A coquette would have laughed in his face and promised anything just to get away from that terrible place. But Dulce was neither a coquette nor a woman of the world; not even to escape from her present terrors could she bring herself to give a pledge she did not mean to keep.

"I cannot marry you!" she said, and, oh! how sad and forlorn her voice sounded. "But oh, Mr. Bertram, be generous! Have pity on me and take me home, and I will be grateful to you as long as I live!"

Dead silence. One would almost have said he had not heard her. It was bitterly cold, and she shivered, in spite of her furs.

That roused him. Taking a small flask from his pocket, and carefully unscrewing the silver sheath to form a glass, he half filled it with wine.

"Drink this," he said, authoritatively. "It may warm you. You look quite pinched with cold!"

She never retorted that it was his fault for exposing her to such wind. She drank the wine mechanically; glad, perhaps, poor child, he should ask her something she was able to perform. It revived her for a few moments. She felt a glow through her chilled frame, and the shivering ceased.

"That is better!" he said, slowly, and, to Dulce's surprise, his face had softened into its usual expression. "And now, Dulce, you are so true and pure-hearted, for your sake I will be generous. You have made me unlike myself. It has been a hard struggle, but you have conquered. I will take you home!"

"Thank you!"

If ever a world of gratitude was spoken in two words it was in those of Dulce's. She lifted her little weary face to Noel Bertram's, and gave him a smile of thankfulness which ought to have touched his heart. She seemed to forget she owed her discomforts, her cold and fright, entirely to him, and only to remember he had promised to take her home.

"Is it very late?"

"Six o'clock," he rejoined, cheerfully. "But the ponies are very fresh; they will do it in an hour and a-half. Dinner is not till eight, as Mr. Clinton goes straight to the Vicarage to consult with Mr. Bengough. You will have time to dress and be in the drawing-room before they come."

She shivered again as he helped her into the carriage, and he poured out some more wine.

"You only took about a tablespoonful before, and I shall never forgive myself if you are laid up with a bad cold!"

She felt then only fit to be in bed, but she contrived somehow to swallow the wine, and then asked him, nervously,—

"How will you find your way? It is getting dark."

"Oh, I shall manage. I have the bump of locality largely developed. Now, Dulce, don't talk any more; you have gone through enough for one afternoon, poor child!"

She leant back in her corner, well content to keep silent, and gradually a kind of heavy drowsiness crept over her.

"I do believe I am going to sleep," she said, suddenly. "It must be the wine!"

"The fresh air most likely; but it is quite the wisest thing you can do. We have another hour before we reach Stoneleigh, so you have plenty of time for a really nice nap."

She closed her eyes and no longer strove against the sleepiness stealing over her. In ten minutes she had lost all waking consciousness, and was slumbering as peacefully as though she had been on her bed at home.

"Poor child!" muttered Bertram to himself, as he looked at her. "Well, it's not my fault; the father should not have made such an absurd will. Besides, she will be happy enough. She is one of those women who need nothing while they have love, and I can give her that!"

CHAPTER X.

NINA reached London at five, and as the train steamed slowly into the terminus for the first time she wondered how Mr. Delamere and she, both perfect strangers, were to recognise each other!

"It will be easy enough," she decided promptly. "Of course I shall have to find him. I do know that he will be dressed as a clergyman, and I don't suppose many elderly clerics will beat the station, while he, poor man, probably has heard nothing of me but my name, which, as I don't wear it labelled on my back, will hardly help him."

Dr. Drake was not far from sixty. Nina pictured his cousin as fifty turned, rather shabby (since tales of his generosity and self-sacrifice were always reaching her), with a grey beard, and a kind of fatherly aspect; in fact, a second Mr. Bengough, only with a holier expression.

There were very few people on the platform, which ought to have simplified the matter, but only made it more puzzling, since Nina could not see a single elderly clergyman; the only man in their garb at all was quite young, and very handsome. An idea did strike her that Mr. Delamere had perhaps sent his curate; but as she did not believe he possessed

such a luxury she soon dismissed the fancy, and concluded the holy Vicar of St. Gertrude's had been called off suddenly to some death-bed, whence she must calmly await his coming.

"I have always heard," she reflected, "the holier people are the less heads they have for worldly matters. Very likely Mr. Delamere has forgotten all about me. Well, I shall wait here half-an-hour, and if he don't then turn up put myself into a cab, and request to be driven to St. Gertrude's!"

But at that very moment the clergyman she had before noticed came up to her.

"Forgive me," he said, simply, "but am I speaking to Miss Dalton?"

Nina smiled.

"Then Mr. Delamere did send to me after all. I was afraid he had forgotten?"

"I did not forget. My cousin's telegram was so vague that I only knew I was to meet a lady named Dalton, and I found the search puzzling."

"Then he was 'Jack!' in person. He did not look a day over thirty-five, and had the finest face Nina had ever seen. Miss Dalton felt quite amazed, and followed him to a cab in an unusually silent frame of mind.

Neither of them perceived a shabby man with a long grey beard watching their movements closely, neither did their driver hear him instruct his own Jehu to keep that cab well in sight.

"It was very good of you to come!" said Mr. Delamere. "The poor thing is sinking fast. I think it cruel of this Mr. Bertram to refuse to see her. Even if he is not her brother a sight of him would have ended her suspicion!"

"Noel Bertram will never think of anyone but himself," said Nina, severely. "Oh! Mr. Delamere, I do hope he is Mrs. Brown's brother; then, perhaps, they will make him leave Dulce alone!"

The Vicar's interest was so great that Nina told him the whole story, adding,—

"I believe everyone thinks me a monster of suspicion; but, Mr. Delamere, I can't like that man, and the idea of Dulce belonging to him seems desecration."

The Vicar did not reprove her for her want of charity, he only said kindly,—

"Well, we shall be at Blackman's-row very soon now, and one point will be set at rest. Miss Dalton, I hope you know where you are going? It is a very poor place, and though the Docketts have hearts of gold they are probably very different from the country folk you may have visited."

Nina shook her head.

"However poor and rough they are I shall like them. I can never forget what they did for her (he had told her Ivy's story). Don't you think, Mr. Delamere, it was beautiful?"

"It was true charity; but here we are!"

They alighted at one end of Blackman's-row, Dulce carrying her bag, and following the Vicar without a single inquiry of where she was to spend the night, or hint that she was longing for a cup of tea. She never showed how she was shocked at the dingy, narrow street and the quiet houses. She gathered her dress closely round her as she mounted the rickety stairs; but that was the only sign of pride that the most radical inhabitant could have detected. Mr. Delamere knocked at the door, and Susan Docket opened it.

"Come in, sir," she said, quietly, "Ivy's sitting up to-night, and seems a little better!"

Mr. Delamere knew quite well it was but the deceitful improvement which precedes the end, the last brilliancy of life's flame before it is extinct for ever, but he did not say so. He went up to the dying girl, and took her hand.

"This young lady," his eyes indicated Nina, "has seen Noel Bertram only this morning!"

"He would not come," said Nina, gently, looking into the fair, delicate face, and likening in it in her mind to a snowdrop

broken down by the storm; "but I have brought a picture of him; and if he is your brother I will write to a friend of mine who may persuade him, only he would do nothing till we were quite sure."

The lips moved wistfully.

"Thank you!"

Nina produced the picture. Mr. Delamere took it from her to hand to the dying girl.

"He drew that himself," said Nina, "only last week. It is a wonderful likeness! I never saw anyone with such a talent for sketching."

Ivy shook her head.

"I never saw my brother with a pencil; he had no time. Let me see it, sir."

They put it in her hands, and waited eagerly for her to speak.

At first they could not understand the look of rapture which crossed her face.

"Then he wasn't drowned?" she murmured; "he's come back to me, after all. Oh, Nat! my love! my husband! It has been dreary work waiting without you!" Her head fell back on the pillows—she was unconscious.

"Well," said Susan Docket, as Jenny chafed the icy hands. "I always thought that husband of hers was a bad lot—men mostly are; but I never thought he'd have been so black as this."

"I don't understand," said Mr. Delamere, gravely. "I thought it was her brother she was so anxious to see?"

"Her husband left her to go abroad, and the ship he said he meant to sail in was lost. Poor girl! she's little better than a child and she believed it. She heard nothing of her brother, though she wrote again and again. At last she saw his name on the boards outside the Paragon Theatre. My dear sir, the thing's as plain as daylight. The husband was a bad lot, and deserted her. Afraid, even though four years had gone, she might find him he just took her brother's name. It's no wonder 'Mr. Noel Bertram' wouldn't come here. He was right enough in saying he had no sister. He knew if once the poor child set eyes on him she'd recognise him, and he'd have to make a home for her, instead of flaunting about as a single man."

Nina thought of Dulce, and thanked Heaven she had come.

"Do you mean he is her husband?"

"You heard her yourself, miss."

"I should like to kill him!" said Nina. "Why, he has actually tried to marry my dearest friend!"

"Like enough," responded Susan Docket, gloomily. "Men are a bad lot, miss! Oh! she's better!"

Ivy opened her eyes and glanced feebly round; then she caught the picture and clasped it to her heart.

"And you are quite sure," she whispered to Nina, "he is well and strong? My own Nat, whom I thought was drowned!"

Nina's indignation was so great she could not command herself to speak; but the Vicar was more master of his feelings.

"The original of that picture is quite well; but he calls himself Noel Bertram."

"My brother's name," she said, simply. "Poor Nat! he often grumbled Brown was common, and his parents were quiet working people down in the country. Often and often I thought, when he left me, I'd go to them, and beg them, for the child's sake, to help me; but I only knew they lived in High-shire, and it seemed impossible to find them with no better clue."

"I will send him," said Mr. Delamere, gravely. "Perhaps he has not understood how ill you are."

"I'm sure I told him," began Susan, but glance from the Vicar silenced her.

"Don't let the poor girl suspect his baseness," whispered Mr. Delamere; "can't you see her one thought now is joy that he is still alive? Let her keep that comfort to the last."



["YOU THINK I'M MADE OF ICE?" BERTRAM CRIED; "OR DO YOU TAKE ME FOR A STOIC?"]

Susan promised with swimming eyes, and Ivy spoke once more.

"I should like to see him, and he would thank you all better than I can. He always had such pleasant ways, my Nat!"

Mr. Delamere knew the tale of John Stone's will and the fraud committed on his executors. It seemed to him the one person who could unravel it was this poor dying wait.

"I suppose your husband and your brother were great friends?"

"Yes, until Nat cared for me," she said, feebly. "You see Noel was poor and proud. He could not forget that our father was a gentleman; and Nat, though he was the brightest and cleverest man you ever saw, was only a servant's son. He was richer far than Noel in the old days in Paris, for you see he had no one but himself to keep, and Noel had me then. Nat had such a way with him; he was a great favourite in the firm, and people called my brother proud. But he was good too. I never knew Noel do an unkind thing save the not answering my letters, and then, you know, I'd vexed him sore."

"I think," said Nina, simply, "he could never have had your letters. Such a man as that would not have left you alone in sorrow." Ivy's eyes brightened.

"He was the kindest of the kind. Ah! if could only forgive Nat!"

It was marvellous how the news of her husband being alive had transfigured her; but she was too far gone to understand the painful side. To her Nat was alive did not suggest the idea that he had been cruelly hiding himself from her all these years.

She was very nearly spent. She kissed Jane and Susan, and thanked them again and again for all their kindness; then she begged them to break it gently to Nat; and before Nina could answer this last appeal of the unselfish wife the gentle spirit had taken flight; and after a few kindly words to the Dockets, and a promise to see them later, Mr. Delamere

gave his arm to Nina, and took her downstairs into the street.

"I am wondering what to do with you," he said, simply. "Our schoolmistress has a spare room, for her sister is away; it is very small and plain. Do you think you would mind going there for to-night?"

Nina assured him it would do admirably, but her voice was half broken by a sob.

"Don't," he said, gravely. "Believe me, if ever death were merciful that poor girl's was. Had she lived only a few days longer she must have known her husband to be about as big a scoundrel as the world can boast! Shall I write to my cousin, Miss Dalton, or will you tell him yourself?"

"I will tell him. But, Mr. Delamere, would you write to our Vicar? He is one of Dulce's trustees, and is very much infatuated with the supposed Mr. Bertram?"

"I will write. It must be conclusive, for, apart from his having a wife at the very time he was paying his addresses to Miss Stone, he never was Noel Bertram at all!"

The Vicar had raised his voice, and the words were distinctly heard by the same shabby man who, at London Bridge, had directed his cabman to follow Mr. Delamere's.

"And you think we can prove it?"

"Easily. You may not be able to produce Noel Bertram, but this impostor's relations are easily found. I grant the name Brown is common enough, but his having Nathaniel before it and his having been a clerk in Paris all simplify the matter. Besides, the poor thing said his parents live in Highshire."

"I wonder," Nina involuntarily stopped, and then added: "No, it is absurd!"

"Let me judge?"

"It is only we have a neighbour in the country whose bailiff is called Brown. He is a respectable man, who has risen to his present position by patient hard work. I never heard of his having a son but one, who was a kind of scapegrace and disappeared years ago."

"It sounds likely."

"But you have not heard all. Our neighbour took a great fancy to Mr. Bertram, and asked him to lunch that he might show him over the grounds. We had often suggested a visit to Raymond Hall, but our guest always objected. However, he accepted the Earl's invitation, but when the day came pleaded business in London."

"I should say he was the bailiff's son. I hope," and the Vicar spoke, feelingly, "Miss Stone has no regard for the impostor?"

"Dulce? She cannot bear him. She seems to have a kind of terror of him!"

"Well, she will soon be free now. Here we are at your present destination. I know they will make you comfortable. I expect you will wish to return to Highshire early to-morrow?"

"Please."

"There is a train about ten o'clock. I will come round and fetch you. Nonsense!" as Nina began to protest, "I can't let you go running about London by yourself, and it's no trouble to me!"

But his brow was so clouded when he arrived the next morning that Nina felt alarmed.

"If you are busy, Mr. Delamere, I can go quite well alone?"

"I assure you I am quite at leisure, only I am troubled. I am the bearer of bad news!"

"Bad news!"

"Be brave," urged the Vicar. "I was told to 'break' it to you; but I never could deal out poison by drops. To me it seems kinder to tell the truth at once!"

He showed her a telegram from Dr. Drake. "Send Miss Dalton down at once, and break it to her that her friend is missing."

Dulce missing! Missing just when relief and certainty had come to end her troubles; and the strangest part was that Nina did not feel surprised. She told herself she had expected it ever since she saw Mr. Delamere's troubled face.

(To be continued.)



[ANOTHER MOMENT, AND MARK HELD ME IN HIS ARMS, LOOKING DOWN ON ME WITH STRANGE ANXIETY.]

NOVELETTE—continued.]

COUSIN TOM.

—:—

CHAPTER III.

In a week Cousin Tom and his friend had settled down at the Hermitage, as though they had known us all their lives. And the strangest part of it was that, in spite of all the indignation the girls had shown before their arrival, we soon became on very friendly terms with both.

Father said he was sure Cousin Tom had quite got over the troubles of his youth. But I did not feel so certain. I noticed that he never willingly remained alone with either father or mother. He could talk to them glibly enough if only one of us girls was by; but he could not bear being left *à-tête-à-tête* with them, and he shunned all allusions to his life in England so pointedly that I felt his cure could not be quite so perfect as father thought.

He was a very pleasant visitor. He had a well-filled purse, and an innate delicacy in using its contents for our pleasure, without letting us feel the obligation.

He was desirous of seeing all the beauties of the neighbourhood, and of course we girls had to be cicerones. Then he was always in a hurry (I fancy this is a quality rather usual to colonials), so horses or steam must be used instead of our feet, and he was so particular about what animals he drove that he ended by hiring the waggonette at the Kelmington Arms, and the two best horses in the landlord's stable for his exclusive use during his stay.

Then he was fond of running up to London, and he never returned empty-handed—music, ornaments, books, a hundred and one trifles, which not being necessities have to be done without by people with limited incomes. All these came to the Hermitage during Cousin Tom's stay; and they were

presented in such a manner that no one could have taken offence.

"I never saw any one so completely altered!" father said to me, when our visitors had been with us a month (broken by several trips to London). "He is a splendid fellow now, and he was a noble character as a young man! I don't mean in the least that he has fallen off, or deteriorated, but he has completely changed. Do you understand me?"

"Not quite," I confessed. "He must be better or worse!"

"Not at all!" said father, a little irritably. "There are different kinds of excellence! Look at Mark Ashton and your cousin; they are utter contrasts; you would hardly say one was worse than the other. That is what I mean about Tom and his former self."

"I don't believe he has got over it!" I jerked out suddenly. "He never goes near mother if he can help it."

Father sighed.

"And your mother declares she can't understand him. She actually prefers young Ashton!"

"Well," I said, philosophically, "as she won't see much more of Cousin Tom I don't know that it matters. He must go back in the beginning of November, and we are almost out of September."

"And he has said nothing?"

"Nothing!" I replied, quietly. "You see, dad, it's an awkward thing to make us a speech, declaring he likes us very much as cousins, but won't have anything to do with us in any other capacity. And that's what he means!"

"Well, they are good fellows, both of them, and I am glad to have seen them."

"But the bills?" I said, dolefully. "Dad, Cousin Tom has the appetite of a giant!"

"You need not think about that, Iris."

"I can't help it!"

"I am not going to tell the others. It might make a difficulty in their intercourse with Tom, but it won't matter with you, Iris. I

bad a letter from Uncle John enclosing me what he called a 'trifling birthday present.' Cousin Tom brought it me sealed up. What do you think was in it?"

"Twenty pounds," I said, "or," with an impulse of hope, "perhaps fifty, as he is so rich."

"Five hundred pounds!"

"Oh, dad! How very nice of him!"

"So you see, Iris, we need not trouble about anyone's appetite, and all the bills are paid. I feel so rich that I am wondering whether I could not give Susy that year at Girtton she covets so much."

"I had much rather you did something for Alice."

He sighed.

"My dear child, it would take a larger fortune to do that, and what ails Vernon? He has been here very little since our visitors came."

Dad and I were wont to discuss the family politics quietly together when we got a chance.

"He doesn't like them," I said, sadly. "It's the first fault I ever saw in Iva. He can't bear to think that they are rich, and can marry as soon as ever they find anyone to please them, while he and Alice are as far off from matrimony as me."

"It does seem hard on him."

"But he shouldn't stop away. It's unkind to Alice; besides, he must have known when he proposed to her that one of her five sisters might meet with a far richer suitor, and so be married first."

Then I added, as a final protest,—

"Cousin Tom and Mr. Ashton can't help being rich."

"I don't think Ashton is rich!"

"Why?"

"Because your uncle spoke of him as a clerk!"

"But he has almost the whole management of the Melbourne House, and it must mean a large salary!"

"I don't think he's rich," persisted father. "I never met anyone with simpler tastes, nor anyone I took a greater fancy to; and, as a rule, Iris, you know we Drummonds have a knack of choosing our friends from people like ourselves of strictly limited income."

I was silenced, but not convinced. A most unpleasant idea had come into my head. I would not have told it to father for the world. I hardly liked to face it myself.

I believed their visit to the Hermitage had brought a great trouble on our two guests, and that the strong friendship between them would make the contest yet more painful. Unless I was mistaken Cousin Tom and Mark Ashton were both desperately in love with my sister Phillis.

Perhaps the term "desperately" sounds strange as applied to the love of a middle-aged man; but the fact is, our cousin was so young in his ways we were always forgetting he was fifty-five, and I am quite sure, however much he had cared for my mother long ago, he cared a great deal more for Phil now. I don't think any of them suspected it except me.

Alice, who would have been the keenest to read the signs, kept very much aloof. She and the curate felt very much in the background just now, and Phil was blind or seemed to be, but I would have staked my gold thimble—the only valuable I possessed—on the fact that Cousin Tom wanted to marry her.

He gave no hint of it to anyone. Indeed, he behaved, I thought, absurdly. Some days he would make a great effort, and seem to avoid Phil entirely.

At other times he would look at her supplicatingly, as though he had done her some great wrong, and would fain plead for pardon.

He actually waylaid me one day, and asked me if Phillis was romantic. Did I think, too, she was of a forgiving disposition?

Of course I interpreted this to mean, was she romantic enough to object to being a man's second love, and would she forgive her husband for having cared for someone before she was born?

Anxious to comfort poor Cousin Tom, I smiled and told him Phil had not a grain of romance about her, and that she did not need to be forgiving, since she never took offence where none was meant; and she was such a dear girl no one ever vexed her intentionally.

I thought this information ought to have been eminently satisfactory; but to my dismay it sent Cousin Tom into the deepest gloom, and made him avoid poor Phil for a whole day.

As to Mr. Ashton, I can't say he was more satisfactory.

He sought Phil's society as much as possible. In fact, he always seemed to engross her when she was not with our cousin.

He studied her wishes, consulted her tastes, and paid her quite enough attention to turn her head, and yet he never seemed in the least jealous when Cousin Tom monopolised her. I could not make it out.

But, as ill luck would have it, I was once again destined to overhear a conversation between these two which was to trouble me more even than the last.

I protest most solemnly I am not an eavesdropper, but the walls at the Hermitage are thin.

My room was next to Cousin Tom's; and one evening, after I had gone to bed, Mr. Ashton was in there talking to him, and I could not help hearing just a little.

"It's no use going on like this," I heard our cousin say, in a most dejected voice; "there must be an end to it!"

Mark Ashton laughed (which was very heartless, I thought, after poor Tom's miserable tone).

"My dear fellow, I am quite willing. Put an end to it as soon as you like. See Phillis, and ask your question."

How dared he call her Phillis? was my first thought; my second, he must feel very

sure of her to risk such a temptation as Tom's wealth would be to her.

"You know I can't!" said my unfortunate cousin. "You have got me completely into a trap. You know I never deceived anyone in my life, and that I should feel a villain if I proposed to any girl until you had spoken out!"

He was singularly disinterested. He thought his wealth gave him an unfair advantage over his rival, and so he wished Mark to have the first innings.

It was very noble of him; but, oh, the strange, dull pain at my heart! Till now I had not guessed my own secret. I had fancied my great desire for Phil to marry Cousin Tom arose only from my sympathy with him, and regard for her pecuniary advantages.

Alas! I knew the truth now. I loved Mark Ashton with all my heart, and he had given his to Phillis!

If only she had been there in her usual place—our beds were side by side—she, too, must have heard; but Phil was spending the night at the Rectory. She had gone there early in the afternoon, and found the Rector from home, and his wife nervous and low-spirited, so she had volunteered at once to stay till the next morning, and hence I was alone.

How anxiously I listened for the next sentence! I had heard so much I might surely listen to the last; but the voices were lowered, and I had some time to wait.

"However this turns out, old fellow, I shall always be grateful to you!" Mark was saying, simply. "Even if I lose my darling, I shall know you sacrificed a great deal for my sake!"

His darling! Oh! why did I suddenly feel cross and envious towards Phil? Had I not declared over and over again she was the prettiest of us all? And yet it was hard to hear Mark Ashton speak of her as his "darling!"

"You've nothing to thank me for," said Cousin Tom, rather gruffly. "And all I ask of you is speed. Can't you hurry matters a little, and speak out? I suppose you think I am an idiot to fall in love at my time of life? But I can tell you, lad, I have caught the disease badly, and this suspense is torture!"

"I can understand. Well, I promise you it shall not last long. I will put an end to it in three days."

Three days! How often I repeated those two words to myself as I tossed uneasily on my pillows. In three days' time Phil's fate would be decided. She would be a *fiancée*—but whose?

Everyone exclaimed at my wan cheeks and dull, heavy eyes the next morning, and I found it very hard to avoid mother's anxious inquiries.

Phil came back after breakfast, bright and blooming, and for the first time in my life I felt angry with her.

"What have you done to yourself?" she cried, with sisterly frankness, when she had dragged me upstairs to our own room. "You look a perfect fright!"

"It doesn't matter," I said, resignedly. "Everyone knows you are the pretty Miss Drummond, and that I am the plain one of the family!"

"Why, I do believe you're cross!" said Phil, good-temperedly. "Did anything happen last night?"

"What should happen?"

Phil looked at me comically. "Well, you know, with two eligible bachelors in the house, and five girls, something might happen any day. I am always expecting my cousin to make his choice."

"He has made it!" I said, sullenly. "It's only affectation to pretend ignorance. Cousin Tom is over head and ears in love with you, and I know you know it perfectly!"

Phil pouted.

"I'm sure he avoids me enough."

"Because you are unkind to him," I said, bitterly. "He knows what a coquette you are!"

Phil opened her eyes.

"I thought a coquette was a girl who changed her lovers," she said, quietly. "Well, I can't possibly do that, for Cousin Tom is the only one I possess, and I am by no means sure he would like the title."

"Don't be a hypocrite!"

"Iris," and Phil stroked my hair caressingly, "I don't think you can be well. It is not like you to say such things, and your head is like fire."

But I turned away impatiently, and would have none of her endearments.

It was a lovely day, just one of those hot, sunshiny days which come sometimes in September, as farewell tastes of summer. There were some famous ruins about ten miles off, almost the only "lion" of the neighbourhood to which our guests had not been.

At breakfast Cousin Tom declared it was just the morning for the excursion, and the wagonette came round very soon after my altercation with Phil.

I would have given worlds to remain at home, but it was impossible without provoking comment, as Alice was to stay with mother, and Susy had business in Settertont, while to send the wagonette with less than its six occupants would have seemed ingratitude.

Cousin Tom, partly from his years, partly on account of his relationship, was always allowed to take us anywhere without a chaperon; so there was no help for it, and I had to take my place next Mr. Ashton (with the twins opposite), knowing all the while how gladly he would have exchanged me for Phil, who looked her prettiest on the box-seat by Cousin Tom's side.

At first Mark tried to talk to me, but he got such short replies he desisted, and bestowed his attention on the twins. I think really he was as glad as I when the drive ended, and we were really at the gates of Barton Castle.

It was a renowned spot for sightseers, and we speedily met some friends with whom we combined forces, Cousin Tom still lingering at Phil's side.

Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton were quite young people, and a very pleasant addition to our party. But for that conference in the room next mine the night before I should have been perfectly happy. We had brought no provisions; there was an excellent hotel almost opposite the castle gates, and Cousin Tom intended for us to dine there before inspecting the ruins.

"Have you ever been over them before?" asked Mr. Hamilton. "No? Then it is lucky you came to-day, for they are very soon to be closed to the public."

"What a shame!" I cried, indignantly.

"No; what a kindness, you should say," corrected Mrs. Hamilton. "It seems that more than once stones have given way, and that now a portion of the old stairs is really dangerous and cannot be depended on; it might give way at any moment. So it seemed best, as people would persist in exploring that portion, however plainly it was marked dangerous, to close the ruins entirely for some time."

"How absurd of people to ignore such a plain warning!" said Cousin Tom.

"Well, you know, Mr. Drummond, young folks are heedless, and rather fond of bravado."

My head was aching sadly, and I felt incapable of moving. While the girls were getting on their hats I told Mrs. Hamilton how ill I felt, and begged her to leave me on the sofa in our temporary dressing-room.

I declared I should be rested by the time they returned, or if they should be unconsciously long I would come to meet them. It was impossible to mistake the way, since, as I have said, the gate leading to the castle ruins was just opposite to the castle gates.

Good-nature itself, she readily consented, and telling me to be quite well when they came back she and my sisters left me. But solitude, though a cure for many troubles, seemed only to augment my misery. It dawned on me suddenly that Mark had promised to bring

matters to a crisis in three days. What more likely than that he should propose to Phil at this very picnic! If I went to meet them returning I should hear the news sooner; nay I could read it for myself in Mr. Ashton's face.

The idea gave me new strength. I dressed myself and went out. The old man at the gate leading to the castle told me, civilly, my party were still in the ruins, and, believing him, I entered. I found out afterwards he was mistaken. They had passed out while he had retired to his lodge for a few minutes, and were at that moment inspecting the village church.

It was a lovely day, and the afternoon sunshine fell bright and warm on the rugged old walls, gilding them with a strange radiance. Sitting down on a stone I wondered if any of the fair ladies who lived in that grand old pile in days gone by had ever suffered as I was suffering now!

I looked about, but saw no sign of my friends, so I concluded they were among the ruins; and, turning, I mounted the old time-worn stairs till I stood on the topmost wall, and sitting down, looked over the lovely country stretched like a panorama at my feet. It was very, very beautiful, but very still. There was something almost deathlike in the quiet around me; look as I would I could see no trace of the girls. No other party of visitors seemed here. I was actually alone.

There was no need for concealment now; the old ivy-grown wall could not betray me. I sat down and cried as though my heart would break. It seemed so hard that Phil should have all, and I nothing. When she and Mark (I could not believe she would refuse him) had gone to Australia, how blank and desolate my life would seem! Alice had her own hopes; I had never been very much to the twins and Sasy. No, Phil was my own special sister, and it was through Phil the blow had struck me.

Hark! what was that? A strange rumbling noise in the distance sounding like thunder. The sun had left off shining now, and the sky was black with clouds. Country born and bred I knew something of weather signs, and I felt a storm was coming. I had only just turned to go down when it broke. The pelting rain came full on me with all its fury; the angry growl of the thunder sounded in my ears, and now and again a vivid flash of lightning blazed in the darkened sky.

I had been frightened of storms from a child. A kind of physical terror, which father said I could not help, always seized me at the first peal of thunder. At home I never could bear to be alone in a storm; dragging some companion with me I retreated to my own room, drew down the blinds, and waited in a state of trembling fear until the fury of the elements had ceased. So well was this known that our servant, when all the family were out, came up uninvited as a matter of course one day to sit with me till a sudden storm was over.

And now here I was in the open air, with no means of escape, no human creature near, and such a storm as we had not had for months. The rain had soaked my thin dress through and through; I was shivering in every limb, and trembling with terror. I had forgotten Mr. Hamilton's remark about a part of the ruins being dangerous. In my wild attempt to get down to what I felt comparative safety I did not heed which way I went and turned to the contrary path by which I had come. Then I heard a dull, rumbling sound; I felt the ground giving way under me, and then the next thing I was lying some feet lower down, a strange, sharp pain in one leg, but perfectly conscious.

"I must have fallen," I thought to myself, "and, oh! how bruised and shattered I feel. I wonder if my leg is broken? I can hardly move it."

The storm was over now, but save that my terror was lessened, its ceasing benefited me little. I was perfectly wet through, and un-

less someone found me I had every chance of remaining where I was till morning, for the pain in my leg was so excruciating I could hardly move it a few inches, much less attempt to walk, and the lodgekeeper's house was so far that my voice would never reach him.

I leant back my poor weary head against a stone, and tried to think. Would he be just a little sorry if I were found there in the morning cold and dead (I must die, surely, if I spent the night like this) or would his joy at winning Phillis banish every other thought? Phil too; she had loved me dearly once, would she spare a few tears for her favourite sister, even though she was to be a happy bride?

The pain was getting worse and worse, a strange faintness crept over me. I wondered, sadly, if this were death. Oh! why was not father here! He loved me; he would have liked to say good-bye. It seemed to me I was sinking—sinking, that I should soon be beyond speech or thought, when a voice that was all too dear fell on my year.

"Iris!"

It was Mark. He had cared just a little then, since he had left his Phillis just to look for me. I tried to speak, but, to my despair, no sound would come; my quivering lips moved, but no words came from them.

"Iris! Iris!" he cried. "Where are you, child? If you are hiding for some idle jest give it up; you don't know the danger of this old place. Iris, won't you speak to me?"

"I am here," the voice was miserably weak and strangely unlike my own, but it guided him to my refuge. Another moment, and with a leap he stood beside me, looking down on me, with a strange anxiety on his face.

"Iris!" and I hardly knew his voice. "What is it, dear? What has happened? Are you hurt?"

"I think so!" I said, faintly. "You see I fell down."

"You fell through that!" he cried, looking in horror at the crevice through which I must have reached my present resting-place. "It might have killed you."

"I think it has!"

"Iris!"

"It was very kind of you to come," I said, feebly. "But it is all of no use. I am sure I am going to die. Please go back to Phil."

But, instead, he sat down and took my head on his knee, chafing my cold hands in his.

"Only try to keep up, dear. Hamilton had his suspicions of an accident, and he promised me if I was not back in half-an-hour he would come on with a carriage. It must be here soon."

"And Phil?"

"Phil!" he returned in a bewildered tone; "did you want her?"

"You know what I mean," I cried in an indignant voice; really anger was giving me new strength. "If I am dying you surely might tell me the truth before I go! I want to know if Phil said 'yes'?"

I am sure he thought I was delicious, but he bore with me very patiently.

"Yes to what, dear?"

"The question you were going to ask her! Is Phillis going to be your wife?"

I thought I was dying, or I never could have asked him. I felt quite sure of the answer, and yet I wanted to hear it.

"Phillis my wife!" cried Mark. "Iris, you must be dreaming, child. You know I never thought of such a thing."

"You told Cousin Tom you would put him out of his suspense in three days! No, I did not listen. My room is next to his, and I could not help hearing it!"

"My dear Iris!" and somehow he still held my hands, and seemed to have no notion of being offended. "You might have heard every word I said to my friend; but I am quite sure I never told him I was in love with Phillis. He is, you know, most desperately, and he is such a sterling good fellow, I hope

she will take him even after I have what he calls 'spoken out.'"

"And isn't that proposing to her?"

"Why no," he replied, quietly. "I have an old-fashioned idea about matrimony, I always meant never to have a wife unless I loved her; and though Phil is a dear girl I can't propose to her when I am in love with someone else. Iris, I should have put my fate to the test long ago, only you were such a child, and I feared to lose all chance by speaking too soon. Darling, I fell in love with you that first afternoon in the porch parlour, and I shall never have a wife at all unless it is yourself!"

I know I gave a great sigh of relief, and then I heard Mr. Hamilton's voice in the distance. I think they lifted me up and carried me to the carriage, but all seems blank. I think after that one blissful moment of knowing I was Mark's choice I fainted.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next thing I remember was opening my eyes in my own room at home, and seeing father sitting by my bedside with a strange, drawn face. I had never seen him look like that before, and I wondered what could be the matter; and why was he not on his rounds, for the sunshine peeping into the room told me it was daytime. All this passed dimly through my mind, and then I felt a strange stiffness and pain about one of my feet. I wondered what could possibly have happened, and as I am given to express my thoughts freely I looked at father and inquired.

"What is the matter?"

Had it been the most wonderful sentence ever spoken instead of one of the commonest and most often used questions in the language, he could not have been delighted. His whole face shone with pleasure, and his eyes telegraphed congratulations to someone in another corner of the room, and mother came forward in a white dressing-gown, looking as if she had been up all night—which I found she had.

"You are better now, dear!" she said, soothingly. "She looks quite herself again, Jim."

"I am quite well," I proclaimed, feebly; "but oh! what is the matter with my leg? I can hardly move it. Is it broken?"

"Hardly so bad as that; but it is a nasty sprain. It will be weeks before you are able to go exploring ruins again, young lady."

It all came back to me then. I blushed crimson; while mother, who was quite innocent of all that had happened, imagined to be from wounded feelings at my father's speech.

"It was only an accident, Jim; don't blame the child when she has been so ill!"

"I am not going to blame her, Helen; only, Miss Iris, before you rush into danger again will you have a little thought of your father's feelings?" "My dear," and the dear man's voice was very tender, "I can't afford to lose my youngest love."

He went away then; and mother told me how I had been brought home unconscious, and for hours they had feared some internal injury; nay, my father had thought the shock itself had hurt me, and that I might never open my eyes again.

He and my mother had watched beside me all night; and now their suspense was over. A little weakness, a greater dread of storms if possible than before, and a sprained ankle were the worst consequences of my fall.

"And, my dear," said mother, gently, "poor Phillis is in such a way; she said you had been vexed with her about something, and she cannot be happy without your forgiveness."

"It was I who was cross!" I said, with another of those strange blushes. "Mother, mayn't I get up; I don't want to stay in bed?"

"But, my dear child, how will you get downstairs. You can never walk, and your father says your foot ought not even to be put on the ground for days."

"I will keep it up. I will promise not even try to stand, if you only help me to dress. Dad or someone will carry me down to the porch parlour, and I can lie on the sofa there, and feel I am among you all."

She yielded.

I felt Mark would be ashamed of his choice. I looked such a little white ghost, when I was at last attired in a warm blue serge; my hair (my one beauty), plaited in one long pig-tail, and tied at the end with velvet.

After all it was Cousin Tom who was my charioteer. I think mother decided Mr. Ashton was too young to be asked to assist in such a delicate matter, and father had gone to the patients he had neglected for so many hours for my sake.

I begged mother not to tell the girls. I wanted to surprise them. I am quite sure my cousin had a strong suspicion how matters stood between me and his friend, for during our progress downstairs he continued to whisper,—

"Ashton has gone to the village to post some letters. I made him go, for he did nothing but sit on the stairs and watch for tidings of you."

I was placed safely on the sofa, and as father had decreed I was not to be excited the girls were only allowed to kiss me, and then were peremptorily expelled; while mother mounted guard over me. But in a few minutes Phillis reappeared.

"Mother, Mr. Ashton wants to know if he may not come in and look at Iris. You know he saved her life. And, mother, the Rectory boy is here with a long message to you. Can't you come and speak to him?"

Oh! Phil! I felt positive she, too, suspected and was enacting the part of a benign providence!

Mother took the suggestion most kindly, declared Mark might come in for five minutes, and she would go and hear the message.

"She'll be kept half-an-hour!" whispered Phil, as she, too, vanished.

"And you are really better?"

It was Mark who spoke—Mark, who looked down on me with love shining in his dark eyes. I knew then, however unworthy I was, he had spoken the simple truth. I, and I only, was his heart's best love!

"I am quite well, except my foot. And, oh, Mr. Ashton, you have saved my life!"

"A selfish service, since you have promised to give that life to me! Iris, is it true? Child, can you really love me?"

"Better than anyone in the world!"

"Well enough to forgive me something? Iris, my darling! I have deceived you! Can you forgive me?"

"You mean you don't care for me, and you are bound to someone else? Perhaps you have a wife in Australia?"

"Sweetheart, you are hard on me! I love you truly, and as to being bound to anyone else I never dreamed of marrying till I saw you; but I am not your uncle's valued clerk."

"Is that all?" and I drew an intense sigh.

"Why did you frighten me so?"

"Then you are not angry?"

"You are you!" I exclaimed, ungrammatically, "and what does anything else matter? I don't mind, however poor you are! Money makes no difference when people love each other!"

"And you would really be content to take me if I told you I should never have more than three hundred a-year?"

"That is quite enough," I said, cheerfully.

"Why, Alice and Iva would be content with half!"

"My dear child, what a generous little thing you are!"

"I'm not," I said, ruefully. "I can't be, because I have nothing to give you—nothing in the world."

"And I want nothing but you and your pro-

mise to forgive this deception, and to pardon my fellow conspirator."

"Cousin Tom?"

"Aye; but he is not Cousin Tom any more than I am Mark Ashton. Iris, you ought to forgive us since you had the chief hand in it. I assure you, when we came to your father's gate, we had no idea of deceiving you."

"But who are you?" I demanded, "if you are not Mr. Ashton and he is not Cousin Tom?"

"We reversed our identity. I am Cousin Tom and he is Mark Ashton, my grandfather's staunch friend and future partner. He is over head and ears in love with Phillis, but he is so ultra honourable he wouldn't speak out till she knew him in his true colours. You see, Iris, you jumped to the conclusion Cousin Tom was elderly."

"He is fifty-five."

"My father would have been fifty-five this year. On the voyage out, dear, he met a young orphan whose father had died at sea; she was friendless and destitute. He had no mother or sister to help her. Although his heart was aching then for the loss of his love he did what few men would have thought of—he married her. I am proud of my father, Iris; he died before I was born, leaving me and my mother to your Uncle John. I was called Tom, and the dear old man always speaks of me as his 'boy.' I know he wrote years ago to tell your father of his son's death. That letter must have been lost, and so the only Tom Drummond you knew of was my father."

"But dad's letter? Surely that told you of our mistake?"

"It did, and I meant to set it right at once; but Ashton thought we could do it better by word of mouth. You see, Iris, we thought our very appearance would tell you the truth; we never dreamed that you would take Mark for your long-lost cousin. He is barely forty, despite those silver threads in his hair. Well, I had a desperate argument with him; he wanted to tell the truth at once, and I tried to keep it back, my dear old grandfather's wishes had placed me in such a fix. I knew I loved you as I should never love again, but if you knew me as Cousin Tom how could I make you believe I was not merely following my grandfather's wishes instead of my own in seeking you for my wife? As for Mark, he has been terrible to manage latterly. The moment he knew his own regard for Phillis he longed to be able, as he phrased it, 'to speak out'; and this he obstinately refused to do until he had his own name back again."

"How strange it is! Father and mother never suspected, and yet they said Cousin Tom had altered in ways and habits; they did not think him so changed in face."

"As a fact, Ashton bears a marvellous likeness to my father. I think that is what first endeared him to the old man. I know grandfather looks on him as another son."

"And you are Cousin Tom?"

"I'm afraid so. Are you really dreadfully vexed, Iris? Remember, dear, you promised to be content, even if I had only three hundred a-year."

"I am not vexed, but I am very sorry."

"Why?"

"Because of us six girls I am the one with the least taste for luxury. Why, don't you know mother calls me the old maid of the family, because I am so economical? Now, Phil loves luxury, and would spend money right royally!"

"She will have plenty to spend, dear. I know grandfather means to make Mark a partner on his return, and I expect they will have five thousand a-year or more, and that means every comfort, you know, in a place like Melbourne."

"It is dreadful—I mean terrible—that Phil will be rich and Alice poor. Why, at that rate, Phil will have about twenty times as much as Alice and Mr. Vernon would regard as ample—and they have been engaged so long!"

"I have a little plan about Alice."

"It's no use to propose taking her to Australia that she may find a rich husband. She will never marry at all unless Iva gets on, and I don't think he ever will."

"Did you know Mr. Hunt was very ill?"

Mr. Hunt was Vicar of Deepdale, a village two miles from Kelmington, with an ideal gothic church, and the loveliest vicarage for miles.

Mr. Hunt had been dying about twenty times within my recollection, but, as he was eighty-nine, it really seemed he would do it in earnest this time.

"It's no use thinking of that," I said, discontentedly. "The patronage belongs to Sir John Reid, and he never gave away anything in his life. He has advertised the advowson for sale over and over again."

"Precisely; and I have bought it. In a few weeks, perhaps a few days, poor Mr. Hunt will have gone over to the great majority, and I shall be able to offer Alice's fiancé the living of Deepdale."

I gasped.

"But it's nine hundred a-year!"

"Well?"

"It must have cost a lot of money!"

"Not more than I can spare if Mark and I rob your father of two daughters. I think it only right I should do my best to ensure your mother having her eldest near her."

"It seems just like a dream!"

"I am quite content with my part of the dream; only, Iris, I hope Phillis will be as forgiving as you are."

She proved to be quite as merciful; and father and mother were too delighted at our happiness to be angry at the subterfuge which had produced it. But there was one most trying circumstance. I always wanted to call my fiancé "Mark," and Phil's "Tom." We both found it almost impossible to reverse their names.

Still, time, which cures so many things, may find a remedy for this.

Our two Australians have promised mother to bring us home at the end of five years on a long visit. And, though none of us can speak of it, I think Tom (the real Tom) has it in his mind to settle in England when his grandfather is taken from us; but we all hope many years are yet in store for the dear old man, who carolled out his congratulations to us two girls as soon as he heard the great news.

The double wedding was fixed for the fifteenth of October, as we had to sail in the *Spartan* on the sixth of November, and wanted a few days at home after the flying honeymoon, which was all time afforded us.

Alice helped to choose our *trousseaux*, but I think there was a kind of patient sadness for her in the task; and I was bound to say nothing to her of Deepdale, lest Mr. Hunt should rally for the twenty-first time.

I don't mean for a moment I wanted the old man to die; but I could not help a sort of thankfulness for Alice when the news came that he had gone over to the great majority.

"I wonder who will be the new Vicar?" said mother to us girls.

"Some college don, I expect," returned Alice. "Dear Iris, don't look at me so wistfully. This doesn't hurt me. No one could expect Iva to get such a living as Deepdale. No; it is when I hear of other people getting little parishes, with two or three hundred a-year, I get envious!"

"There is Iva walking up the garden now," I said, suddenly; "he looks so cheerful, Alice. I should say he had good news for you!"

She shook her head, but she went to meet him all the same, and it was a good hour before she brought him into the porch parlour, and presented him to mother as the new Vicar of Deepdale!

"It is all your doing, Iris!" she said to me that evening—it was my last at home, for tomorrow was the double wedding-day. "We both knew that, Iva and I."

"Then you were quite wrong!" I answered,

cheerfully. "It was his own generous thought. It was just like him!"

"Like whom?" said Alice, laughing. "You never gave him a name."

"Cousin Tom!"

[THE END.]

THE LADY OF FERNS.

AN OLD-TIME ROMANCE.

—O—

THE placid waters of Loch Tyne glittered in the sunlight like molten gold. Great masses of crimson clouds hung out their gorgeous banners in the western sky.

A short distance from the place where the boat of Osmund, the ferryman, was idly rocking to and fro with each motion of the waves, stood his cottage.

It was a modest structure, but its clay walls were hardly discernible, through the over-mantling vines which embowered it, and gave it a picturesque look in keeping with its rural surroundings.

Just before its porch stood an agitated group who had paused in their hurried flight to give the ferryman's wife and daughter notice of coming danger.

The Danes were on the way, and the terrified inhabitants were flying from their homes to escape from the cruelties to be feared at their invaders' hands. This was the substance of their story.

Hulda, the wife of Osmund, stood listening to the startling news with a look of anxiety upon her face which was foreign to its plump, comely curves; while her daughter, Elfrida, who had been drawn to the door by the sound of voices, had merely warmed into a glow of interest and excitement, which made her blonde beauty the more striking.

What did a girl of sixteen know of the danger which menaced her at the hands of these rude strangers? She was far more curious to hear about them than alarmed for her personal safety.

Not so Hulda. She knew well that the uncommon beauty of her innocent child was at such a time the most dangerous of possessions. Better far had she been dwarfed and ugly to look upon, should she come in the way of their invaders' lawless eyes.

White and terror-stricken was the face she turned towards her husband as soon as, their warning given, the group of refugees continued on their flight.

"Ah, Osmund! What can we do?" she said. "It is easily to be seen that we must go to some other place. But where is it? And how can we reach it in time?"

Osmund stood for a while in troubled thought; then his brow cleared.

"I have it," he answered; "I will hide you and the child in a spot I know of, and then I myself will come back and make myself so useful, in the way of helping the knaves across the lake, that they will bear me no grudge, and so leave the cottage uninjured. Hasten and get together some things to keep you comfortable for a few days; and we will at once start for the refuge I speak of."

Spurred on by fear, it took Hulda but a brief interval of time to make her preparations; and Osmund's brawny arms were soon rowing them rapidly away from the home which had never looked so fair and peaceful to the house-mother as now, when she knew not when she might rest her eyes upon it again.

As the little party journeyed onward only one among them drew any pleasure from the peaceful beauty of the surrounding scene. Hulda's glances turned continually toward the home which, after a time, grew dim in the distance; and Osmund's thoughts could only be guessed at from the contraction of his firm lips, and from the anxious frown upon his

brow as he bent to the oars; but Elfrida seemed to be as untroubled as the water which mirrored faithfully the lovely face gazing down into the depths. An exclamation of delight suddenly escaped her lips.

"Look!" she said, laying her hand upon her mother's cheek, and, with a gentle pressure, turning her face in the direction of an island which rose clothed in the delicate green verdure of myriads of fern leaves. "Is it not a pretty picture, that green, round spot in the water, the flaming red of the clouds above, and their reflected shadows in the lake?"

Dame Hulda tried to see the island with Elfrida's eyes, but her own were too full of tears to discover aught but a blur of green in front of them. She tried to answer cheerfully, but she could not make her voice steady.

"Come, wife," said Osmund, "don't be downcast. Do you see how yon place is clothed in ferns? Though they grow so high, and are so lush and strong-looking, they are easily broken down or bent aside, and in that lies our hope of a safe hiding-place."

"Yes; and while we are in it, what will become of you, and of our home?" I see how it will be! You will be made away with, and the child and I will have no protector; nor yet a shelter from the cruel storms of winter."

"Nonsense, wife. I foresee a very different ending of the story. Our cottage is built of mud, so they cannot tear it down for firewood; and as the floor is only carpeted with rushes, such as any one may have for the pulling, I'm sure they'll not covet them. Then, too, the Danes are on the track of richer spoil. They will soon be on the other side. Then you and my Elfrida can come back—when there is no longer any danger."

His cheery words so comforted Hulda that she dried her eyes, and listened with interest to her husband's directions about the way to gain the centre of the island without leaving any mark by which they might be traced.

He was to go first, and push aside the fern leaves carefully, so as not to break them. Then the wife and child were to follow. Afterwards he would return, and carry from the boat the store of provisions and the woollen blankets which Hulda had spun and woven with her own hands for her bridal outfit full eighteen years before, and which she had brought to protect them from the dampness of the night air. Little had she then thought of the present emergency in that far-off, happy time.

After his arrangements for the safety of his loved ones had been concluded, Osmund entered his boat again, and rowed rapidly homeward.

He had scarcely landed, when he was surrounded by the foreigners, who had arrived, and had been making themselves thoroughly at home within his cottage.

As he had said to Hulda, his services were at once called into requisition by the intruders, whose wish was to be at once taken to richer pastures than any to be found upon the spot which held the simple possessions of Osmund.

All through the night he was kept busy, and by the time that he was usually awaking out of his slumbers in the early dawn he had the satisfaction to ferry over the last load. One among them, who was the leader, and who was evidently of gentle birth and breeding, said to Osmund in parting, as he drew a massive ring from his finger, and proffered it to him,—

"Saxon though thou art, the services rendered this night to me and mine will not be forgotten. This ring, if showed to any follower of Odo who may have strayed from our number, and should chance to stop at thy cottage, will be a token of protection to any within its walls. Odo is the nephew of Guthrum, whose name is a power among all Danes, and any of his kin are equally respected."

He turned to join his followers, but Osmund's voice arrested his attention.

"Would my lord advise me to bring my

family again to their home?" he asked respectfully.

Odo's brows knit into a sudden frown, and Osmund drew back in dismay, fearing he had given some offence to the powerful young chieftain; but he was mistaken.

"Let a Dane disregard that token at his peril!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "His head should surely bite the dust to pay for his temerity."

So Osmund's mind was set at rest. Surely, under such powerful protection as that of this haughty young stranger, he might venture to have his wife and child again under the shadow of their own roof-tree. As a matter of precaution, however, he allowed several days to go before he went for them. During that time any straggler would have time to rejoin his comrades, and it was no pleasant thought to Osmund that his beautiful Elfrida should fall under the notice of one of those black-browed strangers, even with Odo's ring upon her father's finger. If any harm should befall her, what good would it be to him to know that the aggressor's punishment would be sure? So he waited patiently until he considered the danger had passed by.

Meanwhile Elfrida had found her island retreat very pleasant, and had by her loving ways and bird-like lightness of spirits contrived to lift the cloud of forebodings from her mother's heart.

When at last Osmund made his appearance he was greeted with a burst of affectionate salutations; but to his great surprise, not a complaint of his apparent tardiness fell on his ears.

Upon leaving the island Elfrida filled her arms with ferns, and also secured a number of the quaint, fuzzy little fronds which were lifting their curly heads above the soil to make ready for the coming year's growth.

"I shall always love ferns after this," she said to Osmund, "and I shall call this particular kind of giant fern, 'Osmunda,' after you, for taking me to this lovely place where they grow so luxuriantly. See these cunning little woolly-looking wheels? I am going to set them out in the place of honour in my own particular garden."

Thus she ran on in her light way as they were rowing homeward. Then she caught sight of the ring upon her father's finger. That was a new object of interest, about which she asked endless questions. From that it was an easy transition to express an interest in its donor. Osmund answered with untiring patience, and Hulda listened smilingly, but with an occasional, "Elfrida, thou'lt weary thy father, or 'child, what carest thou to know whether the intruding Dane be tall of stature, or short as the father's swine herd? He can be naught to thee."

At last they drew near home; but what was the surprise of all to see a tiny "coracle" moored to the post to which Osmund usually fastened his boat.

As they landed and turned towards the cottage a stately youth came to meet them. With an admiring look at Elfrida he addressed himself to Osmund, who at once recognised him as the self-same Odo who had given him the ring.

"I left a very important piece of sheep-skin at your cottage," he said, courteously; "one which had inscribed upon it a rude chart of the country through which I am to lead my men; and feeling sure that the presence of the master would startle you less than that of one of his men, I have rowed myself across in yon cockle-shell which your countrymen use for that purpose."

During the whole of this somewhat lengthy explanation he had kept his eyes fixed—as though charmed by the unexpected apparition of such a wonderfully beautiful creature—upon Elfrida; and, as though fascinated, she had returned his look.

Never before had she seen such a kingly-looking youth! And at last it was with a confused mingling of emotions that she saw him

advances toward her, and say, in pure, though foreign-accented Saxon,—

"Will the 'Lady of Ferns' give me but one leaf of her tender spoils by which to remember that I have really met a being so fair?"

Blushing and confused as she was, Elfrida managed to say,—

"One leaf will fade, is even now withered; but if the stranger will accept it, here is a root, which, if planted, will grow."

With a pleased look, which made his dark eyes as brilliant as the sun at noonday, and which caused Elfrida to cast her eyes down in a tumult of strange emotion, Odo took the offered frond from her hand.

"Henceforth," he said, "the fern is Odo's favourite. It shall be drawn amid the emblems of his house."

Then, with a low obeisance to Elfrida, he motioned her father aside for a brief interview, and Hulda and her daughter went on, and soon disappeared within the cottage.

"Is the maiden aught to thee?" he asked; and when informed that Elfrida was Osmund's daughter, he made answer,—

"Guard her well, Saxon; she is the most peerless jewel that ever graced the ranks of womanhood. If Odo were not a soldier of fortune— But I must not allow myself to talk of what can never be. Farewell, Saxon, and may peace attend you!"

Then he stepped rapidly toward the shore, entered his "coracle," and was soon a mere speck upon the water, so skillfully did he propel the shell-like boat across it.

Weeks and months passed on. A change had come over Elfrida. Her light-hearted, childish ways had given place to the sweet gravity of womanhood.

Occasionally she would steal down to the lake shore and gaze wistfully across, wondering what might be happening upon the other side.

At such times it cannot be wondered at that a noble young face, lighted by beaming dark eyes, came before her as vividly as though present.

Love laughs at obstacles, and Elfrida's heart had been drawn toward that princely stranger with the first glance of the wonderful orbs which had so held her with their magnetism upon that never-to-be-forgotten moment when they had first met.

Once Elfrida saw a large boat shoot out from the opposite harbour and turn its course directly toward her.

She watched it in mute surprise until it came so near that she could see the faces of its occupants.

Then a thrill of anguish pierced her through like a dart, for she saw a prostrate form held in the arms of some of the men, and in that pale, blanched face she recognised the lineaments of the young chief—Odo!

With a low cry she fled to the house.

"Mother," she said, hoarsely, "the noble youth whose ring is upon my father's finger is being borne hither. I fear he is dying. Oh, mother, go forth and meet him! We must not turn him from our door."

"Child," and Hulda cast a wondering look at Elfrida's blanched face, "how strangely you talk! Did any one ever hear of Hulda's doing such an uncharitable thing as that? I almost find it in my heart to scold you for hinting that I could be so unworthy to be a Saxon freeholder's wife!"

Elfrida threw her arms about her mother's neck with a burst of tears coming to relieve her full heart.

"I meant it not, my mother," she sobbed. "I knew not what I said."

Even as she spoke the men approached, bearing their master upon a rudely constructed litter.

Elfrida's eyes rested with a look of terror upon the pale face. It looked so like unto death.

But suddenly the heavy-lidded eyes opened, and fixed themselves upon her; and though they closed again without a look of recognition, while the bearded lips muttered some in-

coherent words in a strange tongue, Elfrida's heart was filled with joy, for she knew life was still in the prostrate frame. She turned to the bearers.

"Bring him in," she said, pointing to the cottage. "My mother will take care of him. She knows much of the healing nature of herbs, and she is more skilled in nursing than many a leech."

The swartny strangers could not understand one word of the maiden's speech; but they could read the language of sympathy and kindness which looked out of the blue eyes; and they followed her unquestioningly into the house, and laid Odo upon a couch of leaves covered with clean, lavender-scented linen, which Hulda hastened to bring from her carefully kept stores for the sufferer's use.

It was long before Odo left that humble shelter. For days he raved in wild delirium. Elfrida watched him and tended him as a mother would care for a suffering child, and she was at last rewarded by a glance of recognition from the eyes which had so long turned upon her with the wild glare of an unsettled reason.

Then, with the great joy which filled her breast mingled another feeling—that of a supreme contempt for herself that she, a Saxon maiden, could feel aught but hatred for a Dane. She was intensely patriotic, and loved her country dearly; but she worshipped with all the force of her nature this man, whom she knew to be the enemy of that country.

So, with Odo's returning strength, he lost the faithful and untiring attendance of Elfrida.

One day he asked Hulda suddenly if it had been a fancy of his disordered mind that a gentle touch from soft and girlish hands had been upon his fevered brow during a portion of his illness, or if he had imagined her—Hulda—to be as young and beautiful as the morning, and with a voice of music like that made by the wind harp when touched by a passing zephyr.

Then when he learned how untiringly he had been ministered to by Elfrida, he begged that she might be called to his bedside, that he might thank her.

Soon she stood before him, her downcast eyes and flickering colour betraying her timid, girlish pleasure at once again being in the presence which had become so dear to her. Her dress, of home-made, unbleached linen, would have proved very trying to a less perfect face and figure. But its tawny folds hung around her like the draping to an exquisite statue, and her creamy white skin and delicate colour looked as pure and fair as though cut from parian marble in contrast to her rough garb.

Odo looked at her with an intense, eager gaze, as though he would fain imprint every feature upon his memory.

"Why did you leave the good work you had so nearly completed?" he asked, reproachfully.

"I am a Saxon maiden," she answered, trying to speak coldly, "and you are a Dane. I nursed you through your dangerous illness, as would any one with a heart in her breast. Now it is not meet that I should stay in your presence any longer than your need demands."

"But if the 'Dane' of whom you speak so slightly should prove your country's friend, and your king's preserver, would you still feel that you must hold yourself aloof from him during all his tedious days of convalescence?"

A glow of delight flooded Elfrida's face with a tide of crimson, as she listened to his words.

"This good right arm will bear me witness," he continued, seeing the girl's agitation, and constraining it favourably. "It was wounded in warding from King Alfred a death-dealing blow."

Elfrida sank upon her knees before Odo,

and seizing one of his hands raised it to her lips.

"Forgive me," she said, humbly, "for I have tried to hate you. Now I will be your slave from henceforth! Command me, and I will obey! Only forgive me for my cruel thoughts!"

"No, maiden," said he, trying to raise her from her lowly position, but sinking back exhausted again upon his pillow, and growing so pale that Elfrida, alarmed at the effect of his exertion, rushed in frantic haste to a cool spring which bubbled up from the earth and formed into a crystal pool just outside the door, and gathering some large leaves which grew upon its brink, she twisted them into a receptacle for the refreshing drops, as in her fright she had neglected to bring with her the gourd which hung within the dresser for that purpose.

But Odo had revived before she reached him, and greeted her novel dish with an amused smile, which brought the blushes again to her expressive face.

From this time forth Odo had no cause to complain of neglect at the hands of his beautiful young nurse, and the usually trying period of convalescence was merged into one of the purest happiness, for the youthful Dane loved the Saxon maiden.

Curious students of history may have met with the story of the Saxon Elfrida and of her Danish marriage; but it is not generally known that a frond of ferns is represented upon the coat of arms of a noble Northumbrian family. It has been thought to be meant for an ostrich plume; but in looking over some ancient manuscripts belonging to the family I came across a quaint account of their ancestor Odo's first meeting with Elfrida, and of his commemorating it by adopting the fern leaf as one of his armorial devices. So that made the matter clear that the tale was not a myth, but true. Odo became a prime favourite with King Alfred after he was securely seated upon his throne, and with his uncle Guthrum (who performed such valuable services in helping the Saxon king to make terms of peace with his turbulent countryman) was ever welcome at Court, whither his beautiful wife often accompanied him, attracting all eyes by her gentleness and grace.

HIS TENANT'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER XV.

THIS IS SERIOUS.

NOTHING occurs to prevent Lord Melcombe keeping his appointment on the morrow, and there is an eager light in his dark blue eyes when he is shown into Mrs. Wynn's drawing-room, which that lady is quick to perceive.

Equally clear would it appear to anyone else, after the lapse of a few minutes, that his lordship is disappointed at the manner of his reception.

Maggie is looking beautiful enough to intoxicates the senses of any man, but she is a trifle more reserved than she was yesterday, and Lord Melcombe feels quite certain that her aunt has been warning her to be careful in her manner towards him.

There is an air of "business" in the room, which, to an ardent lover, is not altogether satisfactory.

A chess-table stands close to the hearthrug, the chessmen—large red and white pieces—arranged upon it; the gas fire has quite recently been lighted in the grate, and the atmosphere of the room is chilly, not to say cold, in consequence.

Without any pause to allow of conversation Mrs. Wynn points to the table, and says,—

"You can play first with Maggie, Lord Melcombe. I'll sit and watch you."

So the young people take their seats at the

small chess table, and Maggie having drawn the white, leads off the game.

Taken as a game of chess there is nothing at all noteworthy in the whole proceeding; taken as a game in which the happiness or misery of two of the persons present are concerned, the situation has both its comic and its tragic elements.

Margaret is ill at ease. She knows in the first place that her father would disapprove of Lord Melcombe's visits, made, as they palpably are, for the sake of seeing her.

She is conscious, too, that if Thurston Rivers still loves her, he would be deeply mortified if he could look in upon her now and see her sitting close to Lord Melcombe, whose eyes have a trick of lingering so long upon her face, that he has each time to be reminded when it is his turn to play.

The presence of her aunt, too, adds to her discomfort. Mrs. Wynn is so unsympathetic that Maggie cannot turn to her for advice, cannot speak to her with the loving freedom with which the majority of girls can address their mother or their female relatives, and she feels now that every word and glance which passes between the young peer and herself is watched and noted, and this makes her hot and cold by fits and starts, and she puts her queen in danger, so that in one of these lapses of thought it is captured.

"How badly you are playing, Maggie," remarks her aunt, a trifle sharply.

"Yes, I don't know how it is," replies the fair girl, blushing, and upsetting her king by her nervousness. A slight accident which both she and his lordship try to retrieve, the consequence being that their hands meet, and even under Mrs. Wynn's very gaze a quite unnecessary pressure is given to Maggie's soft, warm hand.

An impatient, though significant cough from the looker-on is the only comment upon this little episode. Maggie withdraws her hand and blushes still more deeply, and there would be an awkward pause if Lord Melcombe did not at this moment judiciously castle and cry,—

"Check!"

Maggie pulls herself up at this point, begins to play in good earnest, drives away the temptation to be harassed by her own thoughts, or disturbed by the tale of love which Lord Melcombe is telling her with his eyes, and she puts him on the defensive all along the line, takes his queen, traps both of his bishops, and is within one move of check-mating him, when, by a counter attack which she had not foreseen, the tide of victory is turned, and she is defeated.

"There! I thought I should have check-mated you!" cries Maggie, her face animated, her eyes aglow with excitement; "but is has been an interesting game—hasn't it?"

"Most interesting," assents his lordship. "Shall we have another?"

"Oh, it's my turn now," interposes Mrs. Wynn. "I wonder if you will beat me so easily, Lord Melcombe?"

"I don't consider that I have had at all an easy victory," he replies, with a glance at Maggie, which, if she loved him, would more than atone for her defeat.

"No, I think I made a good fight for it at the last," she replies; "but see what you can do, aunt," and she relinquishes her seat to her relative, with whom his lordship is now, out of politeness, obliged to play.

This second game cannot be called an interesting one at any rate; it lasts but a very short time, and Mrs. Wynn's temper is not improved by her speedy discomfiture.

Indeed so annoyed is she that she insists upon a second trial, but again she is beaten, and then tea is brought, and the chess-board is put away.

Lord Melcombe knows that it is now time for him to go, but he lingers.

The room in which they are seated is a pretty one; rather scantily furnished, but the carpets and rugs are new, the few ornaments are in good taste, and there are photographs

of such members of the Walsinghams and Earls, as, after this fashion, Mrs. Wynn delighted to honour.

It is the shape of the room which makes it look pretty; it is rather long, with a bay window at the further end looking out upon a well-kept flower garden, made brilliant by hyacinths, daffodils and tulips; while the second window is at the side of the room, and looks upon the entrance to the house, the muddy road, and the beggarly-looking villas, let at rents under twenty pounds a year, opposite.

Mrs. Wynn, morbidly sensitive as to the position and surroundings of her pretty house, observes that her visitor glances out of the windows, and says tartly,—

"I suppose you wonder why we live in Shakespeare-road, Lord Melcombe?"

He turns to her with a smile on his fair, handsome face, as he replies,—

"Indeed, I was not thinking anything about it!"

Mrs. Wynn contracts her brows, then she says,—

"Lady Beckford and her daughter often drive down this road; there are some poor people, in whom they take an interest, living here."

Not knowing what else to say in reply to this remark, his lordship answers, "Ah, indeed!" looks vacantly out at the houses in question; and, as he thus stands by the side window, a carriage and pair drive slowly by and pull up at one of the small houses nearly opposite.

Lord Melcombe does not move a step, probably does not move a muscle, and when Lady Mildred, who is seated by the side of her mother, looks at him and bows ceremoniously, he returns her greeting politely, but shows no inclination to desert his present companions and join her.

"There will be a jolly row," is his mental comment; "and I should not be surprised if they send for my mother to look after me."

Then he turns to look for Maggie, and sees her at the other window, bending over some flowers, paying no heed to him or to his aristocratic friends.

She is wondering in her own mind whether or not she is behaving rightly in meeting Lord Melcombe in this fashion, in allowing him to believe that he is winning her heart, when, in point of fact, her heart has been ready to be given to another.

If any words of love had passed between Thurston Rivers and herself—if she had ever promised to be true to him, Lord Melcombe's good looks and high position would have no influence upon her; but, though Thurston Rivers had looked into her eyes as Lord Melcombe has done, the magic words, "I love you!" have never yet been whispered in her ears, and still less have her virgin lips yet learned to frame a responsive answer.

So that she is bound by no promise, fettered by no tie; and yet to day she can think of nothing but the beauties of Boscombe Park, the sweet friendship—so abruptly interrupted—between Ina Rivers and herself; and last, though probably not least, of the spontaneous, single-hearted love with which she used to believe that Thurston Rivers loved her.

A remark from Lord Melcombe rouses her from her abstraction, and she asks suddenly:

"Have you seen Miss Rivers lately?"

"No, not lately," he replies, slightly disconcerted by her earnestness.

"She is quite well, I suppose?" is the next question.

To which he replies,—

"I believe so."

Then Maggie sighs.

To save her life she could not repress this sigh. Yet she dare not ask if all are well at Boscombe Castle, and if all have been well since she left the neighbourhood.

If Lord Melcombe likes he can tell her; she gives him the opportunity, but he does not take it. The name of Thurston Rivers never escapes his lips in Maggie's presence; for aught that is said about him by either of them,

when they are together, such a man might never have existed.

In the letters from her father Thurston's name has never been mentioned; no allusion has been made to him, and though Maggie thinks of him tenderly, the heir of Boscombe seems altogether to have passed out of her life.

And yet she cannot quite forget him. He is the fairy prince who first brought love into the sanctuary of her heart, and there his memory remains enshrined, sacred against all comers.

Yet it is but a memory—the memory as of one departed, and Lord Melcombe does not utter a word about Sir Denbigh Rivers, or his son, that can in any way fan the flame still smouldering in her heart.

"May I go for a walk with you to-morrow morning if the weather is fine?" his lordship asks, in a low tone, as he bends over the flowers before them.

"I don't know," she replies, startled by the question. "I don't know what my aunt will say."

"Say to what?" asks Mrs. Wynn, with ears keen to catch the faintest whisper.

"I was asking Miss Earl if I might accompany her in her walks to-morrow or the next day?" volunteers his lordship, boldly and promptly.

"No, certainly not," is the unhesitating reply. "You must never walk alone with Maggie in this place; when I am with her it does not matter, but I rarely go out except in the afternoon, and you must not forget that we are not in your set, Lord Melcombe, and Lady Beckford may not like your being much with us."

"It is really no business of Lady Beckford's," he replies, "but I will call on Thursday afternoon if you will allow me. I shall probably leave the Hall in a few days, though I shall remain in the neighbourhood."

Mrs. Wynn signifies that they will be pleased to see him, but still he does not go until the carriage in which Lady Mildred remains seated is driven away.

To join the ladies and ride with them would be a sign of weakness on his part, and almost a slight to his present companions, so he waits, and then, with an almost affectionate adieu to Maggie, he also goes away.

But his thoughts are not pleasant ones, as he walks back to Crans Hall. He feels annoyed at having been seen at the window of Llan-gollen Cottage by Lady Beckford and her daughter. It seems as though he were being watched and looked after, and he resents it, while he likewise has the uncomfortable sensation of being in a false position, invited here as the suitor of one girl, while he is intent upon proposing to another.

"I'll out the knot of this difficulty to-morrow," he mutters to himself, when he enters the park gates, and walks along the broad drive which winds round to the Hall. "Stubbs shall engage rooms for me at the hotel in the town; there I shall be free, and if the Beckfords are offended I cannot help it."

He takes the first step towards carrying out this resolution by giving the necessary orders to his valet immediately upon his return; then he amuses himself with a novel until it is time to dress for dinner.

Prudence whispers that it will be as well to avoid the ladies of the house as much as possible, and therefore he is the last to enter the drawing-room when they assemble before dinner; and, contrary to his usual custom, he stays long at table with the Earl, talking politics, and, later on, retires with Lord Ronald to the billiard-room.

Lady Beckford observes all this, and she looks at her daughter, often and earnestly.

Has Lady Mildred been indulging in some of her usual caprice, she wonders, and does Lord Melcombe resent her changeableness? It must be so, she decides; and, contrary to her usual custom, she says, in an aggrieved tone,—

"It's a pity you are not of the same mind

two days following, Mildred. You have offended Lord Melcombe by your caprice, and the next thing we shall hear is that he is going away."

Poor Lady Mildred! All day long she has been struggling to keep up an outward semblance of composure; to hide from every eye the agony that is wringing her proud heart; but this evening she is feeling terribly low and depressed. The sight of Lord Melcombe at the window of Llangollen Cottage, and his steady avoidance of her since, has told her that she has no chance against such a powerful rival as Margaret Earl; and now her mother's reproving words are like the last drop in her cup of bitterness that makes it overflow, and to the astonishment of her parent she buries her face in one of the cushions of the settee, and sobs audibly.

Lady Beckford is both alarmed and astonished. Never since Mildred was quite a young girl has she given way to such passionate emotion; and the Countess, fearing that some of the gentlemen may come to the drawing-room, leads her daughter to her own boudoir; then, while the latter dries her tears and tries to regain her composure, the mother insists upon knowing the cause of this unusual agitation.

At first Lady Mildred tries to avoid giving a direct answer, but she has betrayed herself too far to be able to retreat under the shadow of indifference, and gradually the whole story is extorted from her—the tale of her love, her disappointment, her jealousy, together with the little she knows about her rival.

"This is serious," mutters the Countess, when her daughter has finished. "Serious for you, and for him too."

She thinks it still more serious the same night when her husband tells her that Melcombe is going to leave them the next day.

"Is he going home?" is her first question.

"No. He said something about staying in the neighbourhood!" is the answer. "Of course, it is dull here for him. I told you it was a mistake not to ask some nice people to meet him."

Her ladyship makes no reply. Possibly she thinks it was a mistake to invite Lord Melcombe here at all.

But whatever her opinion on this point may be she wisely keeps it to herself. There are occasions upon which silence is golden, and it has always been Lady Beckford's rule to keep all scheming for social aims, or matrimonial connections, from her husband's knowledge.

She lies awake the greater part of this night planning how to turn what at present looks like defeat into victory, and the matter is difficult enough to tax all her talent and energy.

But the happiness of her youngest and favourite daughter is at stake; the welfare of the only son of one of her oldest and dearest friends; and she determines to make every effort in her power to thwart the designs of that singularly beautiful girl, whose face in church has more than once distracted her own mind from her devotions.

"If we fail we shall at least cover our own defeat," she says to herself, with a sigh, when she has at length decided upon her plan of action; "but failure seems scarcely possible. Few girls in her rank of life, and with her limited experience, would be able to stand the tests to which I will put her."

The next morning at breakfast, when Lord Melcombe speaks of his intended departure, the Countess says, cordially,—

"Oh, you must not leave us yet! We expect you to stay a week or two, and Mildred and I are going to call upon some friends of yours to-day, who live in Shakespeare-road. Mildred tells me that Miss Earl was a friend of Miss Rivers, of Boscombe Castle; so she must be a gentlewoman, and she certainly has one of the sweetest faces that I have ever seen."

Lady Mildred fairly gasps for breath, as she hears her mother thus speak.

She sees, or fancies she sees, the whole plan

of campaign marked out by her clever parent; and her proud spirit rebels against it.

"Better," she thinks, "to die of a broken heart than to descend to such meanness!"

But in this she does not do her mother justice. Taken as the world goes, there is nothing particularly mean in Lady Beckford's plan; many people would be inclined to consider that her intended action is generous rather than otherwise; but then, as she truly observed to herself, "There are few girls who could stand the test to which she means to put our heroine."

Lord Melcombe is more astonished than Lady Mildred at the announcement of his hostess; he does not know that he is altogether pleased with the prospect; but he is too accustomed to say that which is polite to ladies rather than what he fully and truly means; to give any hint as to the true state of his feelings now, and he answers carelessly,—

"You will find Miss Earl very nice, but I cannot say much for the people with whom she is living. The aunt is refined, though not too amiable, and the uncle seems to be a good fellow enough in his way."

"But his ways are not our ways you think?" returns Lady Beckford, with a sarcastic laugh. "Never mind, there will be no occasion to invite him here, and one can drop his wife afterwards if necessary. I suppose Miss Earl is only in Beckford on a visit?"

"I presume so," is the reply. "Her father, Captain Earl, is a tenant of Sir Denbigh Rivers, and his daughter was living at home, it seems, when I first met her at the Castle."

"Ah! a charming girl, no doubt; but you mustn't think of leaving us just yet; Lord Melcombe! We have invited several nice people to meet you. At all events, you must stay a few days longer!"

His lordship consents, and Lady Beckford, immediately after breakfast, goes to her boudoir, and sits down to write a long letter to Lord Melcombe's mother, in which, after more than hinting at her son's infatuation, she strongly advises her to make careful inquiries of Sir Denbigh Rivers about his tenant's daughter.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW MAGGIE DINES AT THE HALL.

LORD MELCOMBE is ill at ease. In his inner consciousness he feels that the Fates are weaving a web about him—a web which, in his easy, good nature, he will find it hard to break through.

Try as he will, he cannot get away from Lady Beckford.

He is like a big fly in the web of a small spider—a fly which cannot gain its own freedom without external help, but which is, at the same time, too big and too well able to protect himself to be killed.

Lady Beckford and her daughter have called upon Miss Earl and Mrs. Wynn; but the two ladies thus honoured have not been prompt to return the civility.

Mrs. Wynn knows quite well that when Maggie has left her—probably, indeed, when Lord Melcombe has gone away—the Beckfords will find it convenient to drop her acquaintance, and she is desirous of enjoying the sensation of cutting them.

But there are always wheels within wheels in this complex world of ours; and although his lordship has not as yet ventured to offer Maggie anything more valuable than flowers, he has—delicately, of course—sent a very handsome present of wine to Mr. Wynn, a costly bracelet to Mrs. Wynn, and has earnestly begged that lady to use as her own a pretty light Victoria, which really belongs to the proprietor of the Beckford Hotel.

At first Mrs. Wynn had refused this carriage very positively; but as, despite her refusal, a man came every morning to ask at what hour she would like it, the temptation to enjoy a

good drive—a temptation the full force of which no one can understand who has not lived in the country without any means, except a pair of tender feet, for going about—became at length too much for her, though it did away with the only reason she could advance for not returning the visit of the Beckfords—namely, her inability to do so in a proper manner.

Lady Beckford was out when Mrs. Wynn called, greatly to Maggie's relief, for she is beginning to feel troubled by the way in which Lord Melcombe is gaining an influence over her aunt and uncle. Strangely enough, his influence over herself is not so rapid, if it may be said to exist at all.

Margaret admires the young peer, of course. He is one of those men whom every woman must admire, but she is conscious that the difference between their respective positions is too great to promise happiness, and, much as she likes Lord Melcombe, she is perfectly sure of the fact that she does not love him.

She remembers also her father's interdiction against all suitors, and she cannot help feeling that her parent will be very angry when he knows that by sending her far from one lover he has thrown her into the way of another.

Nothing has been definitely said, however, that can in any way necessitate a decision on Maggie's part.

Lord Melcombe walks and drives with her and her aunt; he comes to play chess in an afternoon, and he makes excuses for looking in at Llangollen Cottage two or three times a day occasionally; but though his manner towards Maggie is tender and admiring to the last degree, he has not yet said a word that can be construed into a declaration of love, or an offer of marriage.

Possibly the reason for this is, that never as yet has his lordship been able to speak to the fair girl alone.

Invariably has Mrs. Wynn been by the side of her niece; never has she left the young couple together for five minutes, and Mary, the maid, has received strict orders to the effect that when her mistress is out she is to say that the ladies are neither of them at home.

On one particular afternoon, about ten days after Lord Melcombe's first visit, Mrs. Wynn is obliged to go to London to receive her dividends, and to sign some papers at her lawyer's office, and she feels that it would be absurd to take Margaret with her, while, at the same time, she does not like to leave her at home.

At length she makes up her mind to tell Lord Melcombe not to call during her absence; and, satisfied that her wishes will be considered in the matter, she leaves home in the morning with her husband, and tells Maggie that she must amuse herself as well as she can.

The morning passes over slowly enough, but about three o'clock a carriage, with the Beckford arms on the panels, drives up to the door, and Lady Mildred Greystone alights, and is shown into the drawing-room.

"I am so glad to find you alone, Miss Earl!" says her ladyship, cordially. "You and I ought to know each other better than we do. I was attracted to you the first time our eyes met!"

"Then the attraction was mutual!" replies Maggie, with one of her rare, sweet smiles; "but it was natural that I should be attracted by you, sitting, as you do, in the chancel, where all the people in church can see your face."

"Yes, that is one of the disadvantages of my father being lord of the manor," replies Lady Mildred, carelessly.

Her eyes, meanwhile, have been engaged in looking at Maggie's hands; there is no ring upon either of them, and she feels, with a certain amount of satisfaction, that the game is neither won nor lost as yet.

"But you are alone to-day, your servant tells me?" she continues; "and I want you to come back with me and spend the rest of the day—do now!"

"You are very kind!" replies Maggie, with hesitation; "but I don't know if my aunt would like me to go in her absence."

"Nonsense! Why should she object?" asks Lady Mildred, sweetly and persuasively. "We will take every care of you, and send you home safely in a carriage. Now go and put on your hat at once; it will be a pleasant change, and I am sure you must find it awfully dull here alone!"

Maggie admits that it is dull, and allows herself to be persuaded; so she goes to her own room, hastily changes her dress and hat, and to the surprise of Lady Mildred she joins her again in a very few minutes, ready dressed for the drive.

Lady Mildred looks at her critically, as she comes into the small drawing-room, and she breathes a sigh of mingled regret and envy; but she smiles sweetly. She honestly and truly likes Maggie, in spite of the jealous pain at her heart; she is attracted to the fair girl in spite of herself, and though she will win Lord Melcombe from her if she can, she will try to regard her as a friend if she fails, and can afford to do so if she succeeds.

Local reputation is not of much value to a stranger, and Maggie knows too little about Beckford to care very much for the opinion of its residents, which is certainly well for her own comfort in the present instance. She has already been the subject of a good deal of gossip; Lord Melcombe's visits to Llangollen Cottage have not failed to attract attention and give rise to malicious comment and positively spiteful innuendos, but when these good people saw Miss Earl riding in an open carriage with Lady Mildred Greytone, they were quite ready to recant, and to take it for granted that Mrs. Wynn's pretensions to be much superior to her surroundings were thoroughly well-founded.

Maggie enjoys the drive, she admires Lady Mildred greatly; but there is something about the Earl's daughter that puzzles her, not the least being the sudden friendly interest which she takes in herself.

The drive through the park is a long one, and Maggie admires the grand old trees, some of which have stood here for centuries, and Lady Mildred tells her how she and her brothers used to climb some of these trees when they were children.

All the cedars here are very fine, and many trees are putting forth their buds. All nature is waking up from the long cold winter, wooed by the warm sun, and undeterred by the keen east wind.

"I have heard that Boscombe Park is very beautiful!" remarks Lady Mildred, as they drive along. "Is it so?" she asks, looking at the face of her companion, and observing how a deep blush dyes the fair cheeks, and how the dark eyes take a softer and more tender expression.

"Yes, it is very lovely!" Maggie replies, with a lingering sigh. "I never heard or read of any place more beautiful!" she adds. "The ground is so hilly; there is such an exquisite combination of wood and water, hill and dale; and then the air is so soft and balmy. It makes one think of some fair island in the southern seas, where it is always summer!"

"A veritable earthly paradise!" remarks Lady Mildred, with a laugh. "You make me quite long to see such a charming spot! It is not far from Melcombe Towers, is it?"

"I don't know," is the reply; "but I don't think it can be," she adds, as a thought recurs to her mind; "because I remember that Lord Melcombe asked Lady Rivers to come over to luncheon one morning, and I believe he had driven over himself on the afternoon I met him there!"

"Oh, then I shall certainly go to Boscombe Park," remarks her ladyship. "I am going to Melcombe Towers very shortly—possibly my mother and father will be going too—and I suppose you will also be returning to Devonshire this summer?"

"I don't know," replies Maggie, a shade of

embarrassment settling upon her lovely countenance.

Then she says resolutely,—

"It is only fair to tell you, Lady Mildred, that my father lives in a cottage at Boscombe, where you might not care to visit us. It is true that I met Lord Melcombe at Boscombe Castle, but I was only there on a visit, just as anyone might meet me in your house to-day. I should be sorry if you took me for anything more than I am."

"Everybody cannot live in a castle, my dear!" replies Lady Mildred, with a smile, "and I don't suppose that your father's house is very much inferior to the one from which I have just brought you!"

"No; it is different altogether," replies Maggie, her thoughts going back with lingering tenderness to the home she has left. "My father and his old servant, who was with him in the army, live together at Cedar Cottage. Smith cooks, looks after the garden and poultry, and does everything. He is a rough old soldier, but very kind-hearted and devoted to my father."

"Just what an officer's old servant should be," assents Lady Mildred, "and if we are in Devonshire at the same time as yourself, I shall be very pleased to call and see you. But here we are, and here is Lord Melcombe!"

The expression of surprise on the young peer's face convinces Maggie that he has had no hand in bringing her here; she would even be inclined to think that he is annoyed at her presence, if there were, to her mind, any possible ground for his being so.

She does not know how he has tried to get away from the Beckfords without giving offence, and how impossible he has found this to be, unless he goes out of the neighbourhood altogether.

And the longer he stays here the more possible does he make it for his mother to interfere before anything definite is settled.

Not that Lady Melcombe can really control her son, or prevent him from marrying whom he will, but she can cause Maggie and him infinite pain and annoyance, which he is most particularly anxious to avoid.

He knows that she has been absent from home for the last fortnight, but she must be back at Melcombe Towers by this time, and she will be expecting to hear from him, or to see him very shortly.

All these things are in his mind as he helps Lady Mildred and Maggie to alight from the carriage, and when the former suggests that they shall take a stroll in the park he walks beside the two girls silently, with the unpleasant suspicion strong upon him that at any moment a hidden mine may explode at his feet.

Now he wishes that he had been less patient, and that he had already asked Maggie to marry him.

The want of opportunity, and the uncertainty as to whether or not Maggie will accept him, have tied his tongue, and made him hesitate; but now he feels that there is no time to be lost, and if it were not for the presence of Lady Mildred he would put his fortune to the touch.

"And win, or lose it all!"

without further delay.

Not being able to speak to any purpose he is singularly silent; even his usual supply of small talk fails him, and Lady Mildred knows quite well that he is annoyed at the step she has taken.

When they return to the Hall they have tea, and Lady Beckford is more than gracious to our heroine.

She shows her over the principal rooms of the mansion, in which are many historic souvenirs, and finally they stop in the music room, when she casually asks Maggie if she plays and sings.

Unconscious that the question is designed to expose her presumed ignorance to Lord Melcombe, who is standing by, Maggie replies

in the affirmative; and, on being pressed to do so, she sits down at the piano, and, to her own accompaniment, sings from the *Bohemian Girl*:

"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls."

There is nothing novel in the performance, a third-rate operatic singer would have rendered it quite as well, but for a school-girl of seventeen the execution is creditable, and Lord Melcombe detects possibilities in Maggie's voice which promise much for the future, and he expresses his opinion so warmly that Lady Beckford is greatly annoyed, and at once desists from her attempt to make Maggie appear either ignorant or ridiculous.

More than once, however, she consults her watch—she is evidently expecting a guest. A carriage is sent to the railway station, and, although Lord Melcombe does not know it, a room at Crane Hall is even now in readiness for his mother.

To do Lady Mildred justice, she knows nothing of the expected arrival of Lady Melcombe.

Her own mother had suggested that she should drive into Beckford and bring back "that girl" to tea; and the attraction which Maggie has for herself, in addition to the desire to know more of her rival, made Lady Mildred at once fall into the trap.

At about half-past six o'clock Maggie says something about going home, but Lady Beckford exclaims promptly,—

"Don't go yet, Miss Earl; stay to dinner with us, we shall be quite alone!"

"You must excuse me," replies the girl, sweetly, "I am not dressed for dinner, and my aunt will expect me at home."

Whereupon Lady Mildred says promptly,—

"My maid can find you a dress; and mother forgets we shall not be alone. Captain Drake, the African traveller, is to dine with us this evening, and we are sure to hear lots of his adventures."

Margaret makes a feeble protest, but her objections are all overruled; and when, an hour later, she allows Lady Mildred's maid to dress her in a new gown of black lace and shining beads, just come from the milliner's for her own mistress, Margaret Earl is agreeably surprised at her own appearance.

She declines the loan of jewels. A few rare flowers from the hothouses are all the ornaments she will wear. But when Lady Mildred sees her a pang of jealousy shoots through her heart; in the presence of such youthful loveliness, her own beauty looks dim and faded.

As for Maggie she feels like one in a dream. The Earl of Beckford takes her in to dinner, she being the only lady guest present, though there are two gentlemen and Lord Ronald, besides the Earl of Melcombe and the ladies of the house.

Presently, in a lull in the conversation, Captain Drake, who is seated by the side of the hostess, turns to Margaret Earl, and says,—

"Lady Beckford tells me that the Rivers' of Boscombe Castle are friends of yours, Miss Earl."

Margaret bows. She cannot explain here how slight that friendship is, and Captain Drake continues,—

"Can you tell me if young Rivers got over that dangerous illness that he had at the beginning of the year?"

"I—I didn't know he was ill," replies Maggie, with a supreme effort, her face every moment growing whiter and whiter, till it becomes as colourless as the table-cloth before her.

"Oh, yes; he had brain fever, and was at death's door," continues Captain Drake. "I heard that it was more than doubtful if he would recover. Some heartless girl jilted him I was told—pity that—"

The sentence is never finished, for Margaret Earl has fainted; and Lord Melcombe, with a cry of fury and despair, has sprang to her side and caught her in his arms as she is falling.

(To be continued)

FACETIÆ.

In the crisis of a divorce suit a woman is apt to be unmanned.

A girl has refused to be courted by a young editor, because he belongs to the weakly press association.

FLIMSY: "I don't know how it is, but the smallest specimen of men invariably get the best wives." Mrs. F. (archly): "Oh, you flatterer."

COUNTRY SCHOOL TEACHER (to infant class): "Yes, dear children, the camel can go seven days without water." Class (in chorus): "Is that all?"

"What is your business?" "I feed the lions in a menagerie." "Must be dreary work?" "On the contrary, it is very funny. They keep the table in a roar."

"The doctor said he'd put me on my feet again in two weeks." "Well, didn't he do it?" "He did, indeed. I'm on my feet all the time. I had to sell my horse and trap to pay his bill."

"Here's a first-class marking ink!" (writes on a piece of linen: "Indelible Ink.") "And here, ladies and gentlemen, I've got a splendid preparation for washing out stains." (Proceeds forthwith to wash out the above "indelible" words.)

MINISTER: "I understand that you do not believe that a person is sufficiently punished on this earth for his misdeeds." Neighbour: "Oh, yes, I do now; but I didn't until I heard you preach." The parson walks on a little perplexed.

MISS GUSHER (to Sarah, the housemaid of Pallet, the artist): "What a beautiful picture! Did your master paint it?" Sarah: "Yes'm." Miss Gusher: "Was it his maiden picture, do you know?" Sarah: "No'm. I don't know for sure; but I heard him call it a landscape."

ENVIOUS young man (speaking of favoured rival): "Yes, George is clever and handsome, but he is so abominably conceited." Sharp young lady: "But, Mr. Dumley, if you were handsome and clever, would not you be conceited?" (A few moments' reflection, followed by total collapse of Dumley.)

IN THE MARKET PLACE.—"You have a very sour look this morning," remarked a cucumber to his neighbour, a dyspeptic strawberry. "Yes," was the tart reply; "one is necessarily unpleasantly affected when compelled to associate with such a seedy party as you are." "Cauliflower by any other name, 'twill smell as sweet," shouted an onion near by, with a peal of laughter.

THE INSTANTANEOUS PROCESS.—Dumley (to photographer): "Do you take pictures by the instantaneous process? I'm in a hurry." Photographer: "Yes, sir." Dumley: "You may take mine; a dozen cabinets." Photographer: "All right, sir; just sit down and wait your turn, please." "How long will I have to wait?" Photographer: "Only a few hours; there's a baby ahead of you."

A HOPEFUL VIEW.—Old Mrs. Bentley: "Have you heered how Mrs. Brown is gittin' on?" Old Mr. Bentley: "She was doin' very well, and, although one lung is gone, the doctor said he thought she might live for some time; but las' week she ketchod cold, which developed into pneumonia." Old Mrs. Bentley (with pensive hopefulness): "Ah, well, if she's only got one lung she can't have it very bad."

AUTHENTIC INFORMATION.—Landlady (to the attic floor, back, a newspaper humourist): "Will you have another piece of the liver, Mr. Burr?" Mr. Burr: "No more, thanks." Landlady: "Mr. Burr, I see so much in the newspapers about chestnuts. Please tell me what a chestnut is?" Mr. Burr: "A chestnut, Mrs. Hendricks, is anything that has been repeated so often that it becomes aged and stale—er, liver, for instance."

JOHNNY at his reading lesson came to the word "corrode." "Corrode, to eat away. I say, mamma, didn't I corrode at that jam pudding-to-day?"

A GIRL got off the Leap Year dodge very neatly the other day. She offered a young man a trifling bet. He from force of habit exclaimed, "I'll take you." Thereupon she held out her finger for the engagement ring.

A TALKATIVE BORE.—Jenkins: "Don't you enjoy the conversation of Bluffton? I think him an inimitable talker." Smith: "Oh, yes, I like it; but there is one thing he can't do that I would enjoy much more." Jenkins: "What is that?" Smith: "Keep his mouth shut."

GETTING ON NICELY.—Wife (who has the foreign language "spasm"): "John, do you know I am getting on splendidly with my French? I am really beginning to think in the language!" Husband (interested in his paper): "Is that so? Let me hear you think a little while in French."

AN ATTACK OF CONSCIENCE.—Cynicus: "So old Milkcan has got religion, eh?" Suburban Resident: "Yes, joined the Church last Sunday." "I buy milk of him every day, wonder if I'll notice any results of his conversion?" "You will. I saw him driving home yesterday with a ten-gallon filter."

"I know that you love me," she said, sentimentally, as he held her to his vest. "I know that you love me," she repeated; "because when I lay my head against your breast your heart beats so loud I can hear it." "That," gasped the poor fellow, as the awful truth dawned upon him; "that is not my heart. That's my watch."

WISER THAN THE JURY.—Lawyer Snap (of counsel for defendant, whose case looks doubtful, because the jury don't seem to enthuse when his witnesses testify): "Are you acquainted with any of the jury?" Witness (an honest man): "Yes, sir. I know more than half of them." Lawyer Snap: "I should think it strange, very strange, if you didn't know more than all of them put together."

ATMOSPHERICAL COMMENTS.—Not expecting him that evening she had eaten heartily of onions, of which she was particularly fond. "How soft and sweet, and, at the same time, invigorating, the air is to-night, Mr. Sampson," she said, as they strolled out on the porch. "It reminds me so much of Italy in the early spring." "Yes, Miss Clara," responded young Sampson, tenderly, "or of Spain, you know."

Two little girls were quarrelling the other day over the possession of a doll. Their struggle in time waxed fiercer, and their mother attempted to interpose in a gentle, motherly way. "There, there, little girls, you mustn't quarrel like that; what do you read in your Bible?" "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," was the unexpected response of one of the little belligerents. And the struggle went on.

"JOHN," she said, sweetly, as she glanced at the clock, "do you know anything about cricket?" "Well, I rather think I do," he answered, with pride. "There is a batsman, bowler, wicket-keeper, and fielders, aren't there?" "Certainly." "Is there a long stop, too?" "Yes." "I'm glad to hear it." "Why so?" "Because," and she glanced at the clock again, "as there is a long stop you must make money. Every club must be bidding for you."

SARCASTICUS and his wife were going to the opera. "Will you please go in and get my goats off the dressing-table?" said Mrs. S. "Your goats?" queried the puzzled Sarcasticus; "what fangle have you women got now?" "I'll show you," snapped the wife, and she sailed away, and soon returned putting on her gloves. "Are those what you mean? Why, I call those kids." "I used to," replied Mrs. Sarcasticus, "but they are getting so old I am ashamed to any longer." He took the hint.

"JONES, the barber, says he is going to eat onions for his health this spring, no matter how much his customers may object to it." "That does not surprise me; I always took him for a man of strong character."

ONE FOOL ENOUGH.—"Maria," said Dr. Dunks, as he came in and threw a folded document on the table, "I have just insured my life for £1,000 in your favour. There is the policy." "Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Dunks, "I hope it may be many years before it will be of any use to me, if ever." "It will be of much use to you if you wish to marry again," he growled. "With £1,000 in cash you can pick out almost any fool you like." "No, my dear," she replied, affectionately, "I think I should want a change next time."

BLESSED BE THE PEACEMAKER.—Fred D., five years old, had to learn a verse to recite at Sunday School. His verse was, "Blessed are the peacemakers." He did not exactly understand what it meant, and his mother explained it to him, telling him that whenever he saw two boys quarrelling or fighting he must be a little peacemaker and try to stop them. The next night as he was being undressed he said: "Mamma, I was a little peacemaker to-day." "Were you?" said his mother. "How?" "I saw two little boys fighting in the street and I stopped them." "That's a good boy," said his mother, giving him a kiss; "and how did you part them?" "Why, I just ran up and fired stones at them till they stopped fighting and ran away."

A QUESTION FOR LAWYERS.—A sheriff, who was rather undersized, was given a writ of arrest against a farmer. Having found the owner of the farm in the field, he explained his business, when he was requested to read his writ, which commenced as usual: "You are hereby commanded without delay to take the body of," &c. "All right," says the prisoner, stretching himself back on the grass, "I'm ready." "Oh, but you don't expect me to carry you?" "Certainly, you must take my body, you know." "Will you wait until I bring a team?" "Can't promise. I may recover from my fatigue by that time." "Well, what must I do?" "You must do your duty." And there he lay immovable until the sheriff left, when he left also. Did he resist arrest?

As a Scottish minister and an English lawyer were riding together, said the minister to his friend, "Sir, do you ever make mistakes in your pleading?" "I do," said the lawyer. "An' what do ye do wi' mistakes?" was the question. "Why, sir, if large ones, I mend them. If small ones, I let them go. And pray, sir, do you ever make mistakes in preaching?" "Ay, sir, I have done sae." "And what do you do with your mistakes?" "Oh, I dispense with them in the same manner as ye do yourself. I rectify the large, an' let go the sma' ones. No lang since, as I was preachin', I meant to observe that the devil was the father o' a' liars, but made a mistake, an' said he was the father o' a' lawyers. But the mistake was so sma' that I let it go."

LIFE IN A VILLAGE.—Stranger: "Pretty little village this." Native: "Yes, we pride ourselves on its beauty." Stranger: "I have always lived in the city, but when I see such a charming place as this I sigh for the quiet and repose of village life. One, however, gets so used to the excitement of a large city that life in the country would be tame, dull; in short, one would die of ennui." Native: "Think so?" Stranger: "Oh, yes, village life is so calm, so peaceful, one would forget that one belonged to the world and leave it." Native: "Well, I don't know much about the excitements of the city, but I know something about those of a village. We've got two singing circles here, a church choir, a brass band, and an amateur dramatic association, and if you move out here it won't be with ennui that you will die."

SOCIETY.

HER MAJESTY is everywhere pronounced to be looking wonderfully the better for her trip; she has settled down to her English mode of life again with celerity, and it is surprising how determined she shows herself to exclude her own subjects from the privilege of gazing upon her Imperial physiognomy, which she accorded so freely to the Florentine populace. She would not even walk down the pier on landing at Sheerness, but had desired a covered way to be erected, so that she could pass from the Royal yacht to the special train unseen of British spectators.

The reigning Duke of Saxe-Coburg will be seventy years of age in a few weeks, and the Duke of Edinburgh is his heir. In consideration of his heirship he receives a small allowance from the German Duchy. What views the Duke himself holds on the subject is not known, for he is not communicative.

The Princess of Wales is to be presented with a piece of needlework by the Liverpool Ladies' Work Society in celebration of the Silver Wedding. The gift has been worked by a lady member of the society, and it is in the form of a centre for a table. It is of white satin, traced in white silk and silver, with the Royal coat of arms, the Prince of Wales's feathers, the Princess's monogram, &c., all exquisitely executed.

The high esteem with which the Princess of Wales is regarded by all classes of the community is nowhere made more clearly apparent than when she visits the theatre. A hearty welcome in the shape of a burst of genuine British applause always greets the Princess when she honours the drama with her presence, which, indeed, is very frequently.

The Duchess of Buccleuch has promised to present the new colours, supplied by the War Office, to the 3rd Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers on the change of the regimental title from Royal Scots Fusiliers to King's Own Scottish Borderers. The colours now in use bear the old title of Scottish Borderers Militia, and were presented in 1877 by her Grace then Countess of Dalkeith, on behalf of the ladies of the the Border counties.

Of all the trades which various members of the nobility have embarked on to raise the wind in these hard times, no doubt the most profitable is that of letter of house-property, and more especially of house-property in London; for the latter, when situated in a fashionable quarter, will command almost any rent for the brief space of the Season. It has become, in fact, quite the regular thing for members of the aristocracy, and more especially for widows of peers, to let their houses to millionaires, whether home-made or American, and to retire either to the Continent or to the seaside, returning in the autumn to their London residences with the agreeable knowledge that there is a good thumping sum at their banker's by way of rent from the millionaire aforesaid on which they can live very comfortably for the rest of the year.

LEAP YEAR gives rise to some pretty conceits. For instance, the ladies of a certain West country watering-place are sending out invitations to their bachelor friends for a dance. Will the relative position of the sexes be reversed throughout the evening? And will the ladies be supposed to select their partners with the graceful condescension which distinguishes the typical dancing man? What a pleasant intellectual titillation this upside-down arrangement would produce! How sweet to see the wall-flowers with their programmes full, the wine-bibbers raging with thirst, because their protectors have forgotten to offer them champagne-cup, and the gilded youth standing in the doorway trying to look as though he didn't care much about dancing!

STATISTICS.

THE spring immigration into the United States from Europe leads to the opinion that the rush this year will be unparalleled. Last year the arrivals at New York alone reached the enormous aggregate of 450,000, or 83,581 more than in the preceding year, and the officials have computed that this year's immigration will be over half a million.

ACCORDING to a good authority 53,000 wells have been drilled in Pennsylvania and New York since the discovery of petroleum, at a cost of £40,000,000. These wells have produced 310,000,000 barrels of oil, which was sold at the wells for £60,000,000. This represented a profit to the producer of £20,000,000. The amount of oil exported is placed at about 6,231,102,923 gallons.

ROMAN type and script are making their way slowly but surely into Germany. The society for the abolition of the German letters, which in 1886 numbered only 2,871 members, now has 4,436 on its lists, which includes teachers, physicians, booksellers, and merchants. In the last year thirty-one professors joined the league—a notable fact. In 1886, according to Heinrich's "Bibliography," out of 6,913 books on artistic, scientific, mercantile, and industrial subjects, 5,816 were printed in Roman type.

GEMS.

ENVY pursues its victims throughout life. It ceases to gnaw only when the grave-worm, its brother reptile, begins.

The art of living easily with regard to money is to pitch your scale of living at least one degree below your means.

In all negotiations of difficulty a man may not look to sow and reap at once, but must prepare business, and so ripen it by degrees.

FREE will is not the liberty to do whatever one likes, but the power of doing whatever one sees ought to be done, even in the very face of otherwise overwhelming impulse. There lies freedom indeed.

ADVERSITY has often developed strength, energy, fortitude and persistence that prosperity could not have produced. The dignity of self-support and self-respect often has been gained when an external prop has been removed.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

STEWED VEAL.—Lay a knuckle of veal in a saucepan with two blades of mace, an onion, a small whole pepper and some salt, with two quarts of water; cover it close, and let it simmer for two hours.

POOR MAN'S PUDDING.—Mix thoroughly two teaspoonfuls of cream of tartar and one of saleratus in one pint of flour, one cup of sweet milk, two and one-half tablespoonfuls of butter, one cup of white sugar and two eggs. Bake or boil, and serve with sugar or treacle sauce.

ORANGE PUDDING.—Grate three sponge biscuits in enough milk to make a paste; beat three eggs, and stir them in with the juice of a lemon and half the peel, grated. Put a teaspoonful of orange juice and one of sugar, with half a cup of melted butter, in the mixture; stir it well, put in a dish with puff paste around it, and bake slowly one hour.

ORANGE FLOAT.—One quart of water, the juice and pulp of two lemons, one coffee-cup sugar. When boiling hot add four tablespoonfuls corn flour. Let boil fifteen minutes, stirring all the time. When cold pour it over four or five oranges that have been sliced into a glass dish, and over the top spread the beaten whites of three eggs sweetened, and flavoured with vanilla.

MISCELLANEOUS.

DON'T QUARREL.—If anything in the world will make a man feel badly, except pinching his fingers in the crack of a door, it is a quarrel. No man fails to think less of himself after than he did before; it degrades him in the eyes of others, and, what is worse, tends to blunt his sensibilities, and increase his irritability. The truth is, that the more peaceably and quietly we get on the better for our neighbours. In nine cases out of ten the better course is, if the man cheats you, to quit dealing with him; if he slanders you, take care to live down his slanders. Let such persons alone, for there is nothing better than this way of dealing with those who injure us.

THE Chief Justice of Indore, a learned Hindu gentleman, was in this country a while ago, and heard Lady John Manners, now the Duchess of Rutland, speak at Marylebone on behalf of a free library. He has told his countrymen what he learned from the public appearance of the lady and her "graceful speech." It was made clear to him that order and modesty need lose nothing by the freedom of women, and he went home to plead strongly against the rule of caste, and the deep-rooted Hindu belief that women are not made to know and do on their own responsibility. Emancipation must of course arrive slowly, and it is not likely that Hindu gentlemen will go too far. But it is good that "Brahmins, Rajpoots, Parsees, and Mohammedans" should be found uniting to condemn infant marriages and the ancient tyrannies which, as a recent article in the *Contemporary* has shown, are, more than may have been suspected, fatal to Christian influence.

VERSATILITY.—The absence of versatility among musicians is very conspicuous. More than any other group of creators they have devoted themselves with singleness of purpose to their chosen craft. While a number of scientific men and painters have shown a respectable skill in music, it would be difficult to find a really eminent musician who has made his mark in any other branch of production. Schumann attained some literary skill as a musical critic, and Mendelssohn, as we know from his charming letters, was not only a man of much wider culture than the bulk of musicians, but acquired a certain facility and grace in the use of his pen; but neither of these has any strong claims to a literary reputation. Perhaps the one exception to the general onesidedness of musicians is Richard Wagner, whose dramatic poems are by many placed on a level with his musical compositions, and whose critical prose works are marked not only by real philosophic acuteness, but by a clear and forcible style. In literature, examples of great and even astonishing versatility are easy to find. A high place must be accorded to those who have attained to real distinction in the two great departments of prose and poetry. Not many names, one imagines, could be mentioned as worthy to be included in this group. Milton, in virtue of his "Areopagitica," Voltaire, Goethe, Scott, Coleridge and Hugo might safely be included. In addition to such undoubted masters of the double craft, others, as Leasing, Schiller, Shelley, are deserving of mention as having displayed skill in both branches of the literary art. Goethe, Goldsmith, Johnson, Coleridge and Hazlitt are all excellent examples of diversified talent. Hoffmann, the novelist, was a good lawyer, a musical composer, and a painter. His versatility almost puts into the shade the encyclopedic attainments of the Admirable Crichton, and the miscellaneous accomplishments of Brougham. Other instances that just need to be alluded to are Rousseau, who joined to his literary gifts a respectable musical talent; and Thackeray, who, when young, showed a marked proclivity to art, and actually began a professional study of it.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CARMEN.—Certainly.

Y. K.—We regret we cannot inform you.

M. A.—The 22nd of February, 1849, fell on a Thursday.

CHYMO.—Sir Walter Scott's monument at Edinburgh cost about £15,000. It was completed in 1840. The material is freestone.

DAIRY.—1. The receipt shall be given next week. 2. Consult a respectable medical man at once. 3. The style of No. 1 is best.

ELEN.—We admire your independence. We think bookkeeping a very desirable occupation, and one that is remunerative.

CONSTANT READER.—The coin if in good preservation would be of some value. Write to the keeper of coins in the British Museum.

BROWN-EYED FLOESIE.—Brush the hair well and wash it in water in which a piece of lime about the size of a walnut has been dissolved.

L. T.—Dancing is best learned from a master and by practice with others, but there are books that teach the steps and figures by illustration.

C. C. B.—If he died without a will, you would receive your dower—a third of his possessions. He could make a will and leave everything to you if he wished.

E. A.—By no means, unless his family and antecedents were well known to you. If this was the case it would not be amiss to say at parting, "I should be glad to see you again."

CORA PAGE.—One of the parties must have resided in the parish in which the marriage is to be solemnized for fifteen days previous. 2. Pretty nut brown. 3. Yes, if expression is good. 4. Rather timid and sensitive.

R. N.—Time is a great solver of difficulties. You are only eighteen, and you can well wait a year. You owe it to your parents to do so much. Meantime try to convince them that they are wrong to oppose your choice. If they still do this, and for no other cause than the young man's lack of money, then follow where your heart leads.

L. M. G.—Adelina Patti has no children. She has adopted a grown daughter of her brother, the gifted and ill-fated Carlo, a brilliant musician, who died in poverty. Adelina's name was Patti. She married first the Marquis de Caux, and subsequently Signor Nicolini, the tenor of her troupe. She has a sister Carlotta, almost as fine a singer as she is, but crippled from childhood.

E. T. T.—To soften and whiten your coarse, red hands, get some real almond paste, or make it by blanching sweet and bitter almonds in scalding water, and then pounding them fine in a mortar, and mixing with a little almond or olive oil or fresh butter and bees-wax. Rub this on your hands, and wear a pair of old kid gloves at night and when doing any kind of work.

JOAN.—It is said to be woman's fate to love men after they tire of them; but perhaps your friend left off visiting you through jealous pique. You say he never wanted you to receive other attentions than his own. Pride may keep him away from you. Relax a little in your cool treatment. Be friendly, but no more. Be as attractive as you can when in his presence, but don't let it be apparent that you are trying to please him. That spoils the effect.

JOE.—Self-consciousness is the cause of your bashfulness. Try to cease thinking about how you look or act. Put yourself under the wing of some bright, kind-hearted matron or nice old maid, tell her your trouble, and get her to help you out. If you have any sisters or cousins, begin by attending them and meeting the other girls in their company. A young man who is attentive and courteous to his sisters and mother doesn't find it hard to be so to others.

C. L. B.—Thackeray defined a gentleman somewhat in this wise: To be a gentleman is to be honest and brave, to be gentle, generous and wise—to possess all these qualities, and to know, besides, how to exercise them in the most graceful manner. Ought a gentleman to be a loyal son, a true husband, an honest father? Ought his life to be decent, his bills paid, his tastes refined? Yes, a thousand times yes. 2. You can do nothing with your nose. 3. Very good.

ROSA wishes to know some comical and inexpensive fancy dress suitable for a very young, petite girl. The witch costume is sharp and comical. Short dress, black and red, in wide stripes—can be of two materials sewed together; black bodice, high, with red puffs on shoulders, and long, black silk gloves; tall, peaked black hat, with a cat's tail at the apex; black stockings; a broom tied with red ribbon. In the Mother Goose costume a broom is also carried, but the costume is a plain short skirt, and a gaudy-flowered overdress much bunched up on the hips; gay striped stockings with low shoes, and a high tilted poke bonnet with a bow on the crown.

FRED is much piqued because he has heard that the young lady he has loved and visited for a long time ridicules him behind his back. He thinks it is because he is so thin; wishes to be told a way to get fat speedily; also how to get even with that fun-making girl! Don't you know, Fred, that girls usually talk against the very man they like best? It is queer, but true. The cause of it is they can't help speaking about the man who occupies their thoughts so constantly, and they are afraid others will find out the secret if they talk in his praise, so they say little detracting things about him often to those they know will defend him. Perhaps, too, your informant exaggerated the fun-making.

C. S.—Much depends upon the experience and ability of the employé.

J. H. R.—A book containing directions on the subjects named would cost about half-a-crown.

D. C.—Thank the lady, and add, "I am very glad to have made your acquaintance."

A. D.—Algernon Charles Swinburne, the poet, was born in London, April 5, 1837.

A. D.—An introduction is indispensable under the circumstances stated. Time may aid you in bringing it about.

F. C.—1. To clean piano keys use a soft rag dipped in alcohol. 2. To clean black silk use cold black tea—the tea made strong.

E. V. C.—Applications for such situations on railways must be made at the office of the chief engineer. If you are well recommended, and have any experience as a fireman, even about stationary or locomotive engines, you will have no trouble in getting a situation.

ETTA V.—November 24, 1863, fell on Tuesday. Do not divide your attentions too liberally; but when you have a sincere admirer, and one likely to marry you, encourage him alone. There is an old motto: "Be off with the old love before you are on with the new."

A. J.—A very delicate perfume is made by filling a bottle with the leaves of the common rose, without pressing them. Pour into the bottle some good alcohol, and cork it closely. If kept well corked for two weeks, a few drops will suffice to scent a handkerchief for some time.

C. F. M.—Alphonso XIII, King of Spain, was born on May 17, 1866, nearly six months after the death of his father, Alphonso XII. His mother, Maria Christina, an Austrian Princess, is the Queen Regent during his minority. He has one sister, the Infanta Maria Theresa, born in 1882.

THE WILD WIND'S VOW.

Oh, where is my love? cried she,
Oh, what of my love? said she.
And a voice came over the sea,
From the Wind so wild and free—
He's riding the ocean wide!

God help these, good Wind, I pray,
To care for my love! said she.
Then this is my vow, roared he:
When I conquer the surly sea
I'll restore thy love some day!

He's my all in life! she cried;
And he has my heart, said she
And he's left his own with me,
And I'll trust him, Wind, with thee,
Till he comes to claim his bride.

But the Wind has heedless ears—
And of vows, oh, why should he
In his rage for the mastery
With the tortured, maddened Sea,
Ever pause for woman's tears?

In his bout with the riotous wave,
For the harque, oh, what cared he?
God's pity, poor girl, for thee!
For None had the Wind and Sea.
They laugh o'er thy lover's grave.

D. B. W.

G. H. W.—Your hair is tawny in shade, and is very beautiful in quality. It is an old saying that a white mark on the thumbnail is said to indicate a coming present; on the first finger, a letter; on the second, a friend; on the third, a foe; on the fourth, a journey to go. Your writing is that of a nervous, sensitive person, who must try to conquer her morbid fears that she is not lovable.

D. C.—Short-hand writers are plenty, and it is not easy for one who is not an expert to get a situation. If you learned type-writing in connection with short-hand, it would be easier to find remunerative employment. You had better not interfere with the shape of your nose. There are persons who pretend to be able to alter the shape of noses, but we do not believe they have succeeded in anything but extracting money from the pockets of their confiding victims. You can try the bay rum and guinea lotion to thicken your moustache. A preparation of nitrate of silver and gallic acid will darken it.

EDIE.—Your teeth can probably be straightened, but it is by a slow mechanical process known to dentistry. Go to a good dentist, or apply to one by letter. As to your other question, if hair can be made to grow upon places on the head that were scalded in infancy, we answer, no. The roots of the hair are killed. Your only remedy is to apply to a wig-maker, sending sample of your hair and size of place on scalp to be covered. He can then make you a false piece which will adhere to the scalp by applying the liquid glue used in mending wood and china—price, ten cents a bottle.

D. C.—You can gain flesh by warm bathing with friction afterwards, eating farinaceous food—bread, beans, potatoes, &c., drinking milk instead of coffee, and quitting the use of tobacco, if you are a slave to that weed. It is an enemy to flesh and fine colour. If the tarter on your teeth is of long standing it will have to be removed by a dentist; if not, try powdered charcoal. It would be a little hasty to ask the young lady you have just been introduced to to allow you to escort her to church unless she had known of you through mutual friends. Don't be in a hurry to revenge yourself on the woman you love. The best form of revenge is not to seem to care for what you heard, and to treat her with friendly courtesy when you meet her.

A. J. S.—"Pouring oil upon the troubled waters" is a familiar quotation, but the author of it is unknown to us. That oil has influence upon water has been frequently proved. Franklin once stilled the sea, to the astonishment of the uninitiated, by stretching his cane over the side of the ship, the cane having a small vial of oil in the end of it. Commander Wilkes, of the United States Navy, in confirmation of this statement, cited an instance where he saw the same effect, in a violent storm off the Cape of Good Hope, from the leakage of a sailing vessel, and stated that it was very curious to observe over what a great extent a small quantity of oil would produce the effect referred to.

R. A.—Victor Hugo's prose and verse writings are powerful, vivid and brilliant, and he was endowed with a great wealth of imagination and command of dramatic effect. Notwithstanding this his works are often marred by extravagance both in thought and diction. His greatest works are generally conceded to be "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" and "Les Misérables," which appeared in 1862, and "Marion Delorme" is his ablest drama. He was the author of numerous works—so many, in fact, that we could not devote space to an enumeration of them. A bookseller in your neighbourhood will furnish a catalogue of these, or can put you in the way of obtaining one. As a philosopher, Hugo took a very high rank.

D. L. C.—There is greater need of education and broad scientific knowledge in farming than in almost any other business. It seems hard that an only son should not be able to comply with the wish of his father and stay on the old farm; but if your inclination points so strongly in another direction, your father is unwise not to let you follow where it leads. The course in a commercial college you so much desire would be a good thing for you. Study book-keeping particularly. As to the comparative remuneration from telegraphy and shorthand, it is hard to tell. First-rate ability in either is needed to succeed. If you learn shorthand, it would be better to combine it with type-writing. One is of little use without the other except to a newspaper reporter.

ADA.—Your petite figure would look particularly pretty in the Red Ridinghood costume. It may be of green—cashmere or nun's veiling—a pretty shade, not too light, that looks well at night. The skirt is short, trimmed with a hand's-breadth band of cherry-red. The stockings are dark, and the low shoes have red bows. The low bodice is laced with red cord over a high waist of white muslin. Around the shoulders is thrown a green cloak, made like the short, loose, sleeveless Spanish cloak or talma (now once more in fashion). It is trimmed with a band of the cherry and tied about the neck with a red tasseled cord. The cloak has a hood with a cherry-red lining, which is drawn over the head and tied under the chin. A red cord with tasseled ends fasten the cloak lightly in front. It is also lined with red. A fancy basket hangs on the arm.

C. V. L.—Cut a slit in one peak of ripe tomatoes, put into a bell-metal or porcelain kettle, and boil until the juice is all extracted and the pulp dissolved. Strain and press through a colander, then through a hair-sieve. Return to the fire, add ounce each of salt and mace, 1 tablespoonful of powdered cloves, 1 teaspoonful of cayenne pepper and 7 tablespoonfuls of ground mustard, and boil at least five hours, stirring constantly for the last hour, and frequently throughout the time it is on the fire. Let it stand 12 hours in a stone jar on the cellar floor, or in some other cool place, and when cool, add a pint of strong vinegar. Then bottle and seal the corks. It should be kept in a cool, dark place. Some persons add to the seasoning ingredients enumerated 1 tablespoonful of celery-seed, tied in a thin muslin bag. Follow these directions closely, and the result will be a very superior tomato catsup.

JENNIE.—Give him time. A young fellow isn't always in the mood for asking, "Darling, do you love me now as well as you did last night?" When the weather gets really warm perhaps his affections will bud forth more energetically. Tennyson tells us:

"In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love,"

so don't send for your ring yet awhile. Time will show whether he wishes to be recalcitrant to his vows or is only taking a breaching spell. Meantime do nothing to your eyes to try to make them large and bright. It is belladonna that dilates the iris and makes the eye seem larger and also brighter, but belladonna is a poison and will ruin the sight and the health. Actresses, when they wish to make their eyes look larger, shut the lids and then draw a camel's hair brush with pale bristles (brown paste) upon it along the eyelashes and just on the edge of the lids—a small, fine dark line—must be delicately done.

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ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 354, Strand, W.C.

WE CANNOT undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 354, Strand, by J. B. SPECK; and printed by WOODFALL and KINDES 70 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.